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Application  
for

**THE NORTH STAR ACADEMY  
CHARTER SCHOOL**

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS  
COLLECTION

MAR 10 1999

University of Massachusetts  
Depository Copy

submitted to

**The Secretary of Education**

on behalf of

**The North Star Academy  
Board of Trustees**



# 1995 Charter School Application

## Basic Fact Sheet

This basic Fact Sheet will be used by the Executive Office of Education to conduct quick analysis of the applications received. The information furnished below must be accurate, and must correspond to that which is provided in the body of the proposal. This information will serve to provide reviewers at the Executive Office of Education with a snapshot of your proposal.

THE NORTH STAR ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

Proposed Charter School Name

SPRINGFIELD

School Location (city/town)

### Contact Person

First FRANK Middle E. Last THOMPSON

Organization North Star Founding Coalition Address 46 COLCHESTER STREET

City SPRINGFIELD, State MA Zip 01109

Telephone (413) 733-7452 Fax (413) 731-0069

### Founding Coalition: (Check Box)

Private  
For-Profit

Parents Teachers Business

☐ ☐ ☐

Community  
Based  
Organization Museum

Other  
Founding  
Group

☒ ☐ ☐

### Grade Level (Check Box)

Elementary ☐

Middle ☐

Secondary ☒

Other

Grade

Level ☐

### Projected Student Enrollment

Projected Student Enrollment (1st Year) 50

Projected Student Enrollment (2nd Year) 105

Projected Student Enrollment (3rd Year) 150

Projected Student Enrollment (4th Year) 150

Projected Student Enrollment (5th Year) 150

Total Number of Teachers 10 full 5

Teacher/Student Ratio 1:15

part

In what type of community will  
the Charter School be located?

Urban School District ☒

Rural School District ☐

Suburban School District ☐

Other Kind of Community ☐

Do you presently have access to  
a facility suitable for a school?

Yes ☐

No ☒

### School Focus:

In succinct terms, describe the focus and primary characteristics of your proposed school and/or students to be served, (i.e., math & science, arts, school-based services, at-risk youth, college preparatory, basic skills, interdisciplinary learning, and competency-based learning).

The goal of the North Star Academy Charter School will be to provide a college preparatory curriculum which emphasizes the skills necessary for success in higher education. The school will target inner-city youth as its primary population and will strive to help them realize their untapped potential for learning.

### Executive Summary (one page):

To help the Executive Office of Education accurately portray your charter school proposal to the public, please attach a one page description of your school. This description should outline, in clear terms, the educational model to be employed; the replicability of that model; student demographics; and other characteristics setting this school apart from other traditional public schools. Above all, this summary should capture the vision of the founders.





## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**THE NORTH STAR ACADEMY** is a response to the urban crisis and refutes the notion that the majority of inner-city youth cannot graduate from high school. This separate entity, the North Star Academy, was conceived by the management team of The Learning Tree Academy which successfully prepares inner-city youth for higher education. At the Learning Tree Academy, most of the young scholars dropped out of school while others graduated who were not directed toward higher education. Today, scores of Learning Tree students are successfully enrolled on challenging college campuses, north and south, although they did not succeed or flourish in the public school system. Utilizing many of the experiences and teaching pedagogues from The Learning Tree Academy, the North Star Academy intends to bring the success of the Learning Tree Academy to public education, where young men and women who have traditionally been failing to reach their potential can become academically and socially skilled and implement their graduation plans.

**WHO WE ARE:** We are an organization of educators, parents, students, community activists and professionals from all walks of life who are committed to effective public education so that all children may reach their potential and lead productive lives. Organized by the executive and teaching staff of Springfield's Learning Tree Academy, the North Star Academy brings with it the goodwill and experience of community partnerships which include Springfield College, Hampshire College, the Springfield YMCA and many other community organizations and resources.

**WHO NORTH STAR ACADEMY WILL SERVE:** Situated in the inner-city, we expect that many of our students will be inner-city residents, the young scholars who usually drop out of school and waste their potential. In Springfield, 68% of the school population is African-American and Hispanic. The drop-out rate in these communities exceeds 50% and fewer than one out of three African-American and Hispanic males graduates from public schools in Springfield. We will be situated in the Upper Hill/Old Hill/Six Corners neighborhood, three sections of the city which always compete for the highest infant mortality, unemployment and drop-out rates. More young people from these neighborhoods wind up incarcerated than attend college. We expect that by virtue of our location, we will serve many young people from these neighborhoods. The North Star Academy will serve all young women and men who choose to enroll and meet the admission standards.

**OUR EDUCATIONAL MODEL:** The North Star Academy is a secondary school which will have levels rather than grades: Level I, II and III. The levels will be viewed as levels of student engagement, effort and mastery rather than simply levels of grade achievement. Each level of student engagement will carry increasing



'expectations in terms of skills utilization. The skills which will be developed include time management, reading proficiency, building vocabulary, personal organization, basic, intermediate and advanced writing, information analysis, career development, typing and word processing, critical thinking, analytical problem solving, computer skills, research methods, college selection, debating, development of thesis and arguments and completion of complex research projects. Coursework will include high school and college level courses using traditional and non-traditional teaching methods. Teaching materials will be relevant, truth-based and culturally awakening. Daily school hours will be increased from the present requirements.

**HOW WE WILL REPLICATE:** Our primary goal is to develop and implement a replicable secondary school model to make public education effective for all. Some of our replication efforts will include public awareness through the media, dialogues with teachers, parents and administrators in the Springfield school system, introducing our model to surrounding school districts, sharing and demonstrating our model in appropriate statewide forums and attracting teachers, administrators and superintendents from the Springfield district to compare the learning and graduation results of our students with students from the mainstream system who are not learning and graduating.





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## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the North Star Academy is to become a laboratory of innovation. Our mission is to respond to the urban crisis through the utilization of effective education pedagogies, assisting inner-city youth to empower themselves by engaging their own learning process. Our mission is to graduate every student who enrolls at the North Star and to develop and implement a post-graduation plan for each student. Our further mission is for the North Star Academy to serve as a statewide demonstration model so that public education in Massachusetts can be consistently effective for all.

Despite our opinion that the entire statewide public education system requires major overhaul and improvement, we recognize that many school districts can boast of success, particularly those which have graduation rates in excess of 90% as many do. On the other hand, how do we categorize school districts with graduation rates hovering around 40% which represents the Springfield condition? In reality, from California to Massachusetts, most inner-city secondary schools have graduation rates below 50% and of these overall rates, the dropout rate among low-income, African-American and Hispanic students are at the highest levels. Our mission is to develop a statewide school model which maximizes the learning process and graduation rates while recognizing that such a model must first work with school-age populations which are neither learning nor graduating from Massachusetts' public schools.

Our mission is also to create a model which invites honest questions. Why are suburban kids graduating from their schools while inner-city students are not? Why are so many inner-city students and their families disenfranchised from the public schools? Why do so many inner-city school teachers live outside the school district? Why is there such a distance between so many teachers and students in urban schools? Why do so many inner-city school students have trouble reading? Why are there so few graduation plans developed for inner-city students who do reach 12th grade? Why are more young black and Hispanic males going to jail instead of going to college? Why are so many black and Hispanic women opting for early motherhood rather than focusing on career development and family planning? Our mission is to respond to these questions with answers which have educational counterparts.

Our mission is to serve all who wish to enroll but especially to operate a charter school which serves the most underserved youth population today - those who are not learning and those who are not graduating. Our mission is to develop a model which engages the most committed, talented teachers in classrooms of



appropriate size who have the will and ability to teach critical thinking, analytical reading, expository writing and verbal presentation skills in a way that builds character and confidence while developing self-discipline, organizational skills and context to a student's learning process.

Our mission is to be unafraid to state that only teachers who are willing and able to understand and identify with the cultures and struggles of the students who sit before them are best suited for the job. Our mission is to integrate culturally awakening teaching materials as well as teaching methods and pedagogies which prepare students for traditional and non-traditional higher education, the workplace and entrepreneurship. Our mission is to provide the educational and logistical support to each student who sits in our classroom until he or she has become an excellent learner and graduate, with the full knowledge that breach of that mission results in the kind of dilemma we have today. .





## SCHOOL OBJECTIVES

There are two primary objectives of the North Star Academy. The first is to serve as a quality school in an inner-city environment which utilizes pedagogies that fully prepare each student to develop advanced thinking, analytical, writing, verbal presentation and other academic and life skills, develops within each student an interdisciplinary learning context and fully prepares each student to pursue higher education and further learning. The second is to demonstrate how our school pedagogies can be successfully integrated into the Springfield public school system and other statewide public school systems.

### **A. What are the school's broad academic objectives for student learning?**

In order to succeed in careers and perform job tasks, today's students must be highly skilled in a variety of disciplines. To be successful in an information-based society today - and to counter the reality that in more and more homes, young people read less, watch TV more and grow up playing video games - educational goals must focus on the development of critical thinking and analytical skills.

Our goals are to utilize the experiences of what we have learned and continue to learn from our experience as educators that when learning is skill-based, it allows each scholar to become engaged in his or her own learning process but when content alone is fed with the purpose of having it fed back on an exam or paper, the light goes out. In fact, much of what goes on in public school today permits the storing of facts and data within a young mind without much concern for the development of the critical thinking and analytical reading skills that mind must develop in order to use or process the information. Moreover, present school system methods fail to acknowledge that most young people today are not involved in independent learning outside of schools (they do not read the news, visit museums or read many books); hence, there is little context in which school-obtained information can be placed. Finally, today's school systems do not have a mandate to develop excellent written and verbal presentation skills. Consequently, much of the information which is presented cannot be passed along or communicated by students who ingest the information but are unable to do much with it.

Our objectives are to focus on the development of critical and analytical thinking, analytical and comprehensive reading, expository and creative writing, excellent language usage, the ability to develop and advance persuasive arguments, the ability to treat information in an interdisciplinary way and the technique of asking the right questions (and then asking another question) to develop a flow of information and answers. The development of





these skills - and having the self-discipline as teachers and administrators to slow down the teaching process until these skills are well-grounded and become part of the learning process - is a primary academic goal of our school.

Our objectives are also to foster uncharacteristic interests and flair in math and the sciences. In the community of young people our school will mostly serve, it is noticeable that math and science skills have been neglected, barring later career choices which call upon the high development of these subject areas. In order to develop skills in these two disciplines, it is necessary to first build confidence and technique into the learning process. Therefore, the sequence of learning is an essential component of the pedagogy. Our goal is to follow our own pedagogy which proves that young inner-city scholars take on math and the sciences with more relish after they are full-time players in their own learning process. This occurs, however, not first but later in the learning engagement process.

A further objective is to continue to identify and infuse into already developed and traditional teaching materials more relevant and "truthful" teaching materials into the curriculum. Teaching materials must not be ambiguous or provide mixed messages to students. If Columbus was a great man, for instance, teaching materials must reflect his greatness with factual evidence. Teachers and students must also be clear as to what defines greatness. If Columbus' lifework and the cultures he represented destroyed the lives and cultures of others, schools and teachers must be unafraid to teach the truth, based upon valid research and competent evidence. Our objective is to be truthful to students in our teaching because today's out-dated curriculum which avoids controversy and the hard issues is a turn-off to many inner-city youth whose lives are inundated with harsh struggles and lack of role models. Inner-city youth digest large quantities of historical and literary pieces considered by mainstream curriculum committees to be inappropriate for both teachers and students. Our objective is to infuse these materials to scholars whose appetite for truth and answers is key to the development of sophisticated and prolonged learning.

Our objectives also include the ability to develop and implement measurable yardsticks to ensure that specific educational objectives are being met and scholars are prepared to move forward to the next level. In determining whether students are reading for meaning and reading critically, for instance, students must be able to identify a thesis and then present their own point of view on that particular thesis. In evaluating whether scholars have developed logical and persuasive arguments on their point of view, thesis, theory, hypothesis or opinion, we will look for how scholars can develop and articulate direct examples, analogies, and hypotheticals to "prove" their points of view. In concluding whether scholars are ready to advance to new





levels of math and science, we will look for the ability of students to apply theorems, formulas, doctrines, research and assignments that have preceded more objective testing. Because developing excellent typing, word processing and computer skills is essential to success in higher education and the workplace, we will require that most papers and assignments are typed. We will also test typing and word processing skills using objective standards.

Additional specific goals include:

- a. Training administrators, teachers and students to understand that young scholars learn at different rates.
- b. Training and inculcating among students the desire and expertise to tutor and help one another with academic skills.
- c. Teaching students to become pro-active in their learning process by seeking out assistance.
- d. Involving and training parents and families to become supportive and instrumental in the learning process of their children. This includes monitoring homework assignments, setting and enforcing reasonable home curfews, cooperating in attendance and punctuality matters and communicating with teachers about personal matters which involve the student's growth and needs. In addition, parents need to understand that young scholars cannot be used to babysit or handle household matters or responsibilities during school hours, a growing dynamic which must be dealt with.

As young scholars advance in their learning skills, clearly measurable objectives include the following:

- a. The ability to organize and manage time, paper and discs.
- b. The ability to conduct unsupervised research.
- c. The ability to organize outlines, first and final drafts without supervision.
- d. The ability to submit complex and lengthy written assignments, and setting forth new and researched information into the context of prior learning and information.
- e. The ability to teach to others what has been learned.

**B. Describe any non-academic goals for student performance.**

- a. The development of a sociological imagination which permits students to understand the lives of those who have less in society: the chronically homeless, persons afflicted with disease and injury, refugees from war-torn lands, senior citizens and others.
- b. An expectation of participation in community service.
- c. The full development of the "mechanical" skills (time



'management, research, typing and word processing, organizational, note-taking) to fully compliment and implement academic skills.





## STATEMENT OF NEED

### A. Why is there a need for this type of school?

There is a need for the North Star Academy because all inner-city youth can become successful academic learners, graduate from high school, pursue higher learning and/or vocational training and reach their potential in life. There is also a need because short of this expressed goal, poverty and the effects of institutional racism will persist and continue to deteriorate the core of every community's future - its youth.

There is a need for this proposed model because in Springfield as is true around the state and throughout the nation in every school district which includes inner-city communities, young people and especailly young people of color are not surviving and thriving as a group. Too many are not learning in the public school system and increasingly, are not graduating. Instead, too many are leaving before the learning process ever had a chance to properly develop and manifest itself and too many are winding up uneducated, unskilled, unemployable, self-defeated, addicted, bitter and incarcerated. Is this acceptable?

The Springfield School System is led by Superintendent Dr. Peter Negrone, an innovative leader who has brought change to a system designed long ago for another era. Negrone has led the charge to motivate a system to think of all students as teachable human beings, to involve parents, support teachers, revise curricula and enforce policy. Moreover, the system is filled with individual miracle workers, teachers who dig into their own pockets for school supplies and equipment and go beyond the call of duty to mentor, counsel, teach and support students with the most needs.

However, this is not enough. Springfield schools are always among the highest dropout rates in the state and several of its four public high schools are in danger of losing their accreditation. Springfield's stated graduation rates of Putnam High School (41% of 10th graders ever graduate); the High School of Commerce (48% graduate) and Central High School (65% graduate) are even more horrifying when the following data is factored in:

- a. The above figures do not include 9th grade drop-out and "walkaway" rates.
- b. 68% of Springfield's school population is African-American and Hispanic.
- c. The drop-out rate in the African-American and Hispanic communities is twice as high as among white students.
- d. The drop-out rate of males is three times higher than females.
- e. Some of those who drop out or walk away never get recorded.





With fewer than one out of three black and Hispanic males not graduating, and with far more black and Hispanic males from Springfield's school system winding up in jail than on college campuses, there is a crisis here, a need which must be addressed boldly and effectively.

**B. Explain why the charter school model would be an appropriate vehicle to address this need.**

We know from personal experience that inner-city youth who drop out of school want to learn, want to pursue their formal education, want to succeed in life. We know this from the cadre of inner-city youth who beat a pathway to the door of The Learning Tree and other community-based education programs, young people with wide ranges of reading levels and academic achievements, all of whom want to succeed in life and see education as the key to their future. Why does the school system not take care of that need?

There needs to be a secondary school model that serves this large population of students in Springfield and throughout the state, to avert needless failure and to demonstrate that it can be done and how to do it.

When the system is broken, it needs to be fixed. This system is broken for the growing numbers of students that this system is failing to serve. There are many things that the Springfield and statewide school systems can learn from successful models. For instance, of Springfield's 2,100 teachers, there are only two black males teaching in grades K-8. With 68% of Springfield's public school pupils Hispanic and black and more of this male population is failing than succeeding, is there something wrong with this picture? Until a school system realizes that teachers need to be equipped by experiences and identity as well as degrees in order to get the job done, nothing will change. Unless more rapid change can be made internally by those charged to do it, nothing short of successful models will accelerate this change. Our current working model, The Learning Tree Academy, as well as other working models throughout the nation and the state need to be the models which Springfield and other urban communities adopt as soon as possible.

The North Star Academy will clearly serve an underserved population in Springfield by providing an option which is presently unavailable within the school system. As a charter school, we will become effective advocates to overhaul the public school system so that the models which work will no longer be the exception but will become the model for a school system which can work in the 21st century. Otherwise, the criminal justice system will drive America into two permanent societies, one constantly in conflict with the other, and the education system will become less and less relevant for all Americans.





## PROFILE OF THE FOUNDING COALITION

A. Describe the make-up of the group or partnership that is working together to apply for a charter, including the names of the founders and their background and experiences.

The Western Mass. Learning Tree, Inc. is submitting this proposal on behalf of the Board of Trustees for the North Star Academy. The current trustees are:

Clifford Flint (Educator) -

Mattie Johnson (Parent) -

Cheryl Stanley (Educator)

John Wilson (Community Advocate)

Jeff Sullivan (At-large)

Tom Hidalgo (Community Advocate)

Ali Whitehead (Student)

Lance Green (Student)

Maria Moraleas-Lobel (At-large)

The above-named Board of Trustees represents a broad-based, coalition of educators, parents, students and community advocates determined to make the public school more effective - for their children and those of tomorrow. The management team of Northstar Academy includes the following persons:

1. Arthur Serota (Educator): A longtime trial lawyer in Springfield who made a career change from law to education, Arthur Serota left his law practice in 1987 after seventeen years - where he was senior partner - to found The Learning Tree, which he now directs. The Learning Tree is a community-based education and support center which works with inner-city youth preparing for higher education. Most Learning Tree students dropped out of school; students prepare for college through classes and tutoring which focuses on critical thinking, analytical reading, expository writing and computing skills. Situated in the heart of Springfield, Massachusetts' African-American community, scores of "Tree" students are now thriving on college campuses in six states, north and south, some in their junior year, while countless others are gainfully employed or pursuing entrepreneurial careers or the arts. Hundreds of young people have turned their





lives around in this program which has won awards from the Massachusetts Bar Association, Black Men of Greater Springfield and the local media. Brooklyn born and raised, he is a 1966 graduate of the University of Maine in Orono where he received his Bachelor of Science from the School of Agriculture. In 1969, he was awarded the Juris Doctor degree from Suffolk University Law School in Boston. A civil rights and criminal defense lawyer who handled more than 5,000 cases, Serota was frustrated at how the criminal justice system chewed up young men who grew up in poverty but offered no alternatives to incarceration. Convinced that education was the most appropriate form of intervention in the lives of young people before they became emmeshed in destructive lifestyles and observant that most people who wound up incarcerated had also dropped out of school, Serota left law practice to found The Learning Tree. He has been its executive director for the past six years where he also teaches math, sociology and interpreting literature.

Arthur Serota was a leader in the Springfield trial bar and acknowledged to be one of the best criminal defense lawyers in Western Massachusetts. He was also volunteer chief counsel for the Springfield branch NAACP, a member of the Board of Editors of Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly and Chairperson of the Massachusetts Bar Association's Hampden County Bench-Bar Committee.

During his twenty-five years in Springfield, Arthur Serota has always been a community participant. For sixteen years, he was host and producer of "Open Forum," a public affairs radio program which aired historical and contemporary solutions to war, violence and institutional racism at the community and national level. For six of those years, he was also volunteer Public Affairs and Business Director of WTCC-FM, a 4000 watt public affairs radio station. He also authored a weekly column in the Springfield Inquirer a community newspaper in the black community and has written widely about racism and education issues.

In addition to his administrative and founding leadership in his Springfield law firm and The Learning Tree, Arthur Serota served as volunteer administrator for three years in the 1980's in Zimbabwe (on sabbatical leave from law practice), administering water development, drought relief, agricultural, school and health projects in the rural areas, working with Oxfam America, Save-The-Children and Africare.

In the world of education, Arthur Serota has taught at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst as an instructor, taught English and Literature in rural high schools in Zimbabwe where English is a second language, has served as instructor to the bench and bar in legal seminars and has, for the past six years, served as a teacher and curriculum developer at The Learning Tree. He has also lectured widely on scores of college campuses in the Northeast. He is a 1993 recipient of the Golden Apple Award for excellence in education, a TV Channel 40 award for being an innovative, effective teacher.

Arthur Serota is also the recipient of the Eyes On The Prize Award from Public Television affiliate Channel 57 in Springfield





. for his lifetime achievement in civil rights, the Community Service Award in 1991 from the Massachusetts Bar Association, the Black Men of Greater Springfield's Community Service Award in 1994, the Outstanding Achievement Award from the Springfield Area Council for Children and many more community service awards from local, regional and statewide organizations.

2. Frank Thompson: (Educator) Deputy Director of The Learning Tree since 1993, Frank Thompson's duties include headmaster of The Learning Tree Academy, curriculum developer, computer lab director, personnel supervisor and co-administrator. He also teaches social studies, science and computing and co-teaches math and interpreting literature. Prior to this position, Frank was a GED instructor at The Learning Tree from 1991 - 1992.

A 1987 graduate of Amherst College majoring in political science where he obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree, Frank Thompson was later awarded a Masters Degree in Community Health Education from the University of Massachusetts School of Public Health. Although a native of Fort Worth, Texas, Frank Thompson thereafter made a commitment to the community of Springfield, Massachusetts where he has devoted his life ever since. In addition to his work at The Learning Tree, Frank Thompson was Program Manager at Dunbar Community Center in Springfield from 1992-1993 and Project Coordinator at Dunbar from 1990 - 1992. While in college, he served as a health studies instructor and was a tutor/counselor at Upward Bound in Texas.

Frank Thompson also lives in Springfield's core city with his wife Carol and baby daughter Nia. Active in community affairs, Frank Thompson has served as a volunteer with the Black Men of Greater Springfield, has served on the Programming Committee for the Center for Human Development, on the steering committees of the Springfield Community Partnership and Prevention Alliance and Springfield Infant Mortality and Teen Pregnancy Coalition. In 1991, he was a member of the Board of Directors of Stop Teen Pregnancy.

Frank Thompson is also the annual Co-Chair of the Ernest J. Henderson High School to College Forum and for the past five years, has coached basketball at Dunbar Community Center, boy's team age 10 and under. He serves on many community panels and forums which focus on youth, education and community development issues.

3. Eric Lerner: A longtime script writer, novelist and editor, Eric Lerner also serves as the Learning Tree's education director and writing instructor. A graduate of Harvard University, Eric Lerner was a Hollywood script writer and film producer for twelve years. His credits include "Bird On A Wire" starring Goldie Hawn and Mel Gibson which he co-scripted and "Critical Condition," starring Richard Pryor, which he co-produced. Eric Lerner also edited a literary and poetry journal on the west coast for a number of years whose contributors included Pulitzer Prize winning authors and writers.





Eric Lerner grew up in the New York metropolitan area where his mother was curriculum director of New York City's largest school district. A writer and basketball player, Eric was originally drawn to The Learning Tree by the similarity of young men with whom he grew up. He and his wife also serve as mentors and tutors to Learning Tree students in the fields of writing and science respectively.

**B. Discuss how the group came together, as well as any partnership arrangements with existing schools, educational programs, businesses, non-profits, or any other entities or groups**

The North Star Academy is a collaborative of educators, parents, students, professionals and community advocates which formed naturally as a result of being associated with The Learning Tree or, over a period of years, being associated with members of North Star's management team. Specifically, The Learning Tree formed in 1989 as a response to the urban crisis by creating a community-based educational model which has become more effective than the public education system. The success of this model led this management team to develop an educational advocacy component to The Learning Tree Academy and over the years, the management team formed partnerships and projects designed to demonstrate the model as well as improve the effectiveness of public education through other projects. Utilizing the opportunity to create and administer a charter school is a natural outcome of this groundwork. Likewise, members of the Board of Trustees who will be responsible for the administration and operations of the North Star Academy are persons committed to improving public education:

Tom Hidalgo is a long-time community activist in the Hispanic community who has worked with Art Serota on housing and education issues. Tom and Art served together on a School Department task force which resulted in improving curricula and other community-driven issues. Tom is a former member of the Board of Directors for the Puerto Rican Cultural Center in Springfield. Tom has been a community advocate for the Springfield Action Commission and currently works for the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts as its Education Officer while also studying for a doctorate degree in multicultural education.

Mattie Johnson is a parent of a Learning Tree student (Willie Johnson). Her son Willie dropped out of school but is doing remarkably well at The Learning Tree. Her nephew Joseph Johnson also dropped out of school, graduated from The Learning Tree Academy and is now a James Baldwin Scholar at Hampshire College. She is committed to improving public education because she is personally aware that young men from the inner-city (like her son





'and nephew) have the ability to be academically successful but it did not happen in the Springfield public school system. She will be serving a two year term and will be replaced by the parent of a North Star Academy student.

Ali Whitehead is a Learning Tree graduate and a pre-med (biology) major at Hampshire College. He dropped out of 11th grade, passed his GED and is doing remarkably well at Hampshire. Mr. Whitehead will be serving a one-year term and will be replaced by a student of the North Star Academy.

Lance Green, another Learning Tree graduate, is an education major at Springfield College and a pioneer in the Community Teachers Partnership Program, a collaborative with Springfield College, the School Department and The Tree designed to reduce the drop-out rate. Committed to improving public education, Lance intends to teach in the Springfield public school system upon graduation. He has also served as a teaching assistant at Springfield's DeBerry Elementary School. Mr. Green will be serving a two-year term and will be replaced by a student of the North Star Academy.

Jeff Sullivan is a vice-president of the Bank of Western Mass., a small local financial institution which has a strong commitment to community development. Jeff has demonstrated his commitment to this endeavor by working closely with Frank Thompson to pursue building options for the North Star Academy.

John Wilson is an Assistant Dean at Springfield College and Director of Multicultural Affairs. His commitment to public education and the North Star Academy stems from his tenure as a community advocate who links Springfield College students with community based education programs.

Dr. Cheryl Stanley's work at the Urban League of Springfield (as its education director) and now at Westfield State College (as a professor in the education department) is a portrait of a life committed to improving public education. Her links to the community and the world of education will be a real strength to North Star's operations.

As the director of Springfield's Spanish American Union, an Hispanic advocacy and service agency, Maria Morales-Loebel, who is also a parent, brings long-time commitment to improving public education as well as the quality of life for all persons.

Cliff Flint, the long-time and now retired principal of Putnam High School (and former Assistant Principal and teacher) as a trustee, brings to the North Star Academy a full career as an educator and administrator in the Springfield School System. His expertise and motivation to improve public education brings unprecedented richness to a Board of Trustees founded by educators





and others committed to improve the effectiveness of public education.

The North Star Academy inherits the goodwill and partnerships which The Learning Tree developed over the years. These include:

1. The James Baldwin Scholars Program: A partnership between The Learning Tree, Northern Educational Services and Hampshire College in Amherst, Learning Tree and NES prepared students attend Hampshire for a transitoinal year, then matriculate as degree candidates on full scholarship. Established in 1992, 14 Learning Tree students are thriving at Hampshire College, some in their third year. This partnership will now expand to include the North Star Academy.

2. The Community Teachers Partnership Program: A partnership between The Learning Tree, Springfield College and the Springfield School Department, Learning Tree prepared students attend Springfield College as education majors on full scholarship. The Springfield School Department has agreed to hire all certified graduates - which is the goal of the project - to improve the effectiveness of public education by training talented youth from the community to serve as teachers. Three Learning Tree students pioneered this program in the Fall, 1994 (including North Star Academy Trustee Lance Green); five more will enter in the Fall, 1995, ad infinitum. The North Star Academy inherits this partnership.

3. Partnership with the Black Men of Greater Springfield: In the summer of 1994, The Learning Tree and BMGS formed a collaborative so that members of BMGS could serve as significant mentors to youth. This has resulted in effective mentorships to now be shared with the North Star Academy.

4. Partnership with the Springfield School Department: In recognition of The Learning Tree's role of educating students who dropped out of school and remain eligible for school department services, The Springfield School Department funds one of The Learning Tree's GED teachers. In addition, members of both organizations work together on task forces and on student issues and collaborate informally on education issues concerning individual students as well as broader policy issues.

5. Partnership with Springfield College: A strong partner with The Learning Tree (Springfield College provides the Tree's facility and The Tree serves as a link with the larger community), The Learning Tree's work and mission is strongly endorsed and supported by Springfield College president Dr. Randolph Bromery, former Chancellor of the Board of Regents of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and former Chancellor of the University of Massachusetts. The goodwill and experience of working together collaboratively now accrues to the North Star Academy.





6. Partnership with the Springfield YMCA: This multi-faceted partnership, will benefit the students of the North Star Academy as the Y continues to reach out to Springfield youth to enrich their lives. The Tree and the Y joined together with Springfield College, the Private Industry Council and the District Court of Springfield to form the Model Ten Program which works with probationers to improve their lives through education and employment services. The Y also provides free memberships to Learning Tree students and is looking for further ways to work with Springfield youth. Inevitably, the North Star Academy and the Springfield YMCA will develop a program to provide constructive and wholesome activities for North Star students.

7. Philanthropic partners: The North Star Academy also inherits the Learning Tree's philanthropic partners, foundations whose commitment to improving public education is well documented. These include the Amelia Peabody Foundation in Boston, the Public Welfare Foundation (a private foundation) in Washington, D.C., the Frank Stanley Beveridge Foundation in Boca Raton, Florida, the Tides Foundation in San Francisco and Mirage Studios (the Ninja Turtles people) in Northampton, MA. Significantly, the Davis Foundation of American Saw in East Longmeadow, MA has committed to supporting North Star's start-up budget as has the Bank of Western Massachusetts agreed to extend a line of credit to the North Star Academy..

**C. Include any plans for further recruitment of founders or organizers of the school.**

We intend to recruit additional trustees, and specifically, will select more parents and students from the enrollment of the North Star Academy. Currently, Lance Green and Ali Whitehead serve as Trustees, both of whom are students. These trustees will serve for one year, then rotate off the board to be replaced by two students enrolled in the North Star Academy. Likewise, future parents of North Star enrollees will serve on the Board of Trustees. We will continue to seek out potential nominees for the Board of Trustees who will enhance the mission and operations of the school.



## **SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS**

Consistent with North Star's philosophy and mission that young inner-city scholars and their families are entitled to an education system which is effective and that all of society benefits when all of society is educated and productive, the North Star Academy will be located in the inner-city so as to be accessible and inviting to inner-city youth as well as all others eligible to enroll.

### **A. Describe the area where the school will be located.**

The North Star Academy Charter School will be located in an accessible location within the inner-city, in the heart of Springfield's African-American community. Several sites are currently under review. The school will be located either in the Upper Hill, Old Hill or Six Corners neighborhoods.

### **B. Why was this location selected? Are there other locations suitable to the needs and focus of the school?**

This location was selected so that the school could be inclusive of those students who need our school the most, inner-city youth who are not learning in and ultimately dropping out of school. Locating the school in the heart of the inner-city also helps to attract the most qualified and the most suitable teachers to carry out the mission of our school. There are other locations which may be suitable but locating ourselves in the inner-city is critical to accomplishing our mission.

### **C. Describe any unique demographic characteristics of the student population to be served.**

The Old Hill, Upper Hill and Six Corners neighborhoods, where most of the student population is likely to reside, are three of the economically poorest neighborhoods in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Statistically, these neighborhoods annually rank among the highest statewide for infant mortality; they are neighborhoods in which crime, street violence and substance abuse are rife. These neighborhoods are also characterized by high unemployment, low-income single parent households and a high incarceration rate among our youth. These neighborhoods have high drop out rates. Combined, these three neighborhoods are approximately 75% black, 20% Hispanic and 5% Asian and white. Collectively, these are vital neighborhoods, populated with many families who are struggling to succeed. Many of the youth are not reaching their potential in school, have dropped out of school or are on the verge of dropping out. These youth store vast







resources of intellectual and academic potential. They are our target population..

**D. What are the school's enrollment projections for the first five years? What is the school's ultimate enrollment goal?**

The North Star Academy will be comprised of three educational levels: Level I, Level II, and Level III.

In the first year, Level I will enroll 50 students.

In the second year, the total enrollment will be 105 students; Level I will enroll 55 students and Level II will enroll 50 students.

In the third year, the total enrollment will be 150 students; Level I will enroll 55 students, Level II will enroll 50 students and Level III will enroll 45 students.

In the fourth year, the total enrollment will be 150 students; Level I will enroll 55 students, Level II will enroll 50 students and Level III will enroll 45 students.

In the fifth year, the total enrollment will be 150 students; Level I will enroll 55 students, Level II will enroll 50 students and Level III will enroll 45 students.

**E. What grade levels will be served? How many students are expected to be in each grade or grouping?**

The North Star Academy Charter School is a secondary school and will serve what is ordinarily 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grades. Students will initially enroll in Level I, II or III. Levels I and II are one to two years each (depending upon each student's skill and progress). Level III is a one-year tenure, from which students graduate.

It is expected that approximately 50 students will be in each level, for an approximate total of 150 students enrolled.



## **RECRUITING & MARKETING PLAN**

All new ventures are dependent on successful marketing for their survival. We understand that the North Star Academy will be not different. Under the authority of the North Star Academy Board of Trustees, the Western Mass. Learning Tree, Inc. is prepared to commit both staff time and organizational resources to ensuring that the marketing of the North Star Academy is successful.

**A. Demonstrate how you will publicize the school to attract a diverse pool of applicants.**

### **MARKETING PLANS**

The North Star Academy will be marketed to the entire population of Springfield, MA. This marketing will include coverage in mainstream, citywide media outlets (public-service-announcements on regular & cable TV, commercial & non-commercial radio and feature stories in the Springfield Union News) and community oriented outlets (youth agencies, community newspapers and community leaders). The marketing efforts will be particularly aggressive in communities which currently have high numbers of youth who are being educationally under served (most notably Mason Square and the North End). Efforts are already underway to establish a referral network with educational programs in both communities, in particular those programs which work with hard to serve youth. Most of the paid marketing efforts (ads, flyers, canvassers, booths at major community festivals and bilingual recruiters) will be concentrated in those communities.

**B. What type of outreach will be made to potential students and their families?**

**C. Describe efforts to recruit students without parents to advocate on their behalf.**

### **RECRUITMENT PLANS**

The North Star Academy will utilize the marketing activities as a recruitment tool to inform potential applicants about the school and its mission. In addition to those efforts information will be provided to high school guidance counselors and individuals/ programs in the communities who work with hard-to-serve youth (community centers, peer leadership groups and . The North Star Academy will also utilize two recruiting tool that continue to be invaluable to the Learning Tree Academy; Word-of-mouth referrals (young men and women who stop in because they heard about the program from someone "in the hood") and personal referrals.





The utility of these two methods should not be under estimated. Every year the L.T. Academy receives far more request for admission (30-50) than the 10-15 slots available and constantly carries a waiting list of 3-5 interested young men who are waiting to be enrolled into the program at the earliest opportunity. Most of these are young men who have dropped out of school & left home and who the high schools claim can't be tracked down.\* THIS IS WITH NO PAID ADVERTISEMENTS OR PUBLIC RECRUITMENT DRIVES! The word-of-mouth referrals which the L.T. Academy receives is based n the solid reputation that programming by the Western Mass. Learning Tree, Inc. has earned in the community. That reputation will undoubtedly be shared by the North Star Academy Charter School. Personal referrals from young men who have had prior associations with the Western Mass. Learning Tree and from community leaders/ youth advocates also accounts for a large percentage of the L.T. Academy's enrollments. We anticipate that these types of referrals will provide the North Star Academy with access to populations of youth traditional institutions cannot reach, and usually can't even begin to provide services.

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\* At the start of the 1994-95 school year the School Committee made an issue out of requiring the Central Office to track down the large number of students from the 1993-94 school year who were reported as untraceable when they did not re-enroll for the 1994-95 school year. A large portion of those students were found to be enrolled in other school districts or community programs like the Learning Tree Academy. However, until the School Committee made it an issue the Central Office was content with reporting the status of those students as unknown.



## ADMISSIONS POLICIES

In evaluating applicants for admission the North Star Academy Charter School will not discriminate on the basis of **race, color, gender, ethnic origin, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, age, ancestry, athletic performance, English proficiency, academic achievement or disability/special needs status**. Every effort will be made to ensure that all programs, activities and services are available to each student regardless of race, color, gender, ethnic origin, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, age, ancestry, athletic performance, English proficiency, academic achievement or disability/special needs status.

Although the prior "official" experience of the North Star Academy's managing entity, the Western Mass. Learning Tree, has been mainly with young men, the organization continues to gain valuable informal experience dealing with the academic and personal needs of young women who are involved in the lives of the men we serve and who walk through our doors seeking assistance. The Western Mass. Learning Tree has successfully assisted more than 10 young women with addressing their academic/personal problems and gaining admission into college. Therefore, we are not entering into this project as novices in dealing with the unique needs of young women, particularly young mothers. Both the Board of the North Star Academy and the staff of the Western Mass. Learning Tree acknowledge and accept the responsibility for creating a non-threatening, supportive environment for students of both genders.

The admissions process can be critical to the ability of any institution to meet its mission. For elementary and secondary public schools that mission is to provide a quality education for all youth in the community. In practice, many schools educate only those students who agree to learn on the teachers' terms and simply "warehouse" the rest, moving them from one grade to the next without addressing the quality of their learning experiences. When the frustration level builds up to a point where both the student and the school are ready to give up the students is labeled "at-risk". So when the student inevitably drops-out the school can say "See we told you he/she couldn't be taught". The Board of the North Star Academy and the staff of the Western Mass. Learning Tree feel that most of these students are teachable and can be prepared for successful college careers. For this reason, the admissions policy of the North Star Charter School places a high priority on selecting students who have dropped out of the public school system or have been labeled "at-risk" of dropping out. (These students are not the top priority because the charter school legislation requires that siblings be given top priority.)

At the Learning Tree, we know very well that a school only lives up to its responsibility to educate our youth when it works







, with every student who comes through the door equipped to learn. The North Star Academy Board of Trustees and the Western Mass. Learning Tree staff maintain that "equipped to learn" means being interested in learning and being willing to move beyond "I don't know!", (which can be the first step in the learning experience), to "How can I find out more about this?". Part of helping students make that jump is making the learning process relevant to their lives outside the classroom. This has been the case with the Learning Tree Academy and will be the case with the North Star Charter School.

The founding coalition of the North Star Academy feels that we can take any student, regardless of prior academic problems, who is genuinely interested in learning and move him towards college admission. However, we also recognize the need for minimum standards when working with students in a group setting. For this reason the following set of minimum requirements must be met before any applicant will be considered for admission into the North Star Academy:

- 1) The applicant must have completed (graduated) the eight grade or an equivalent level of formal education.
- 2) The applicant must possess reading skills which are at or above the seventh grade level.<sup>1</sup>

&

- 3) The applicant must be able to write at the sixth grade level or higher.<sup>2</sup>

Those youth who do not meet these minimum requirements will be directed to other programs, both within and outside the school system, where they can develop the skills they are missing and also move on academically until they are ready to participate in a college-prep learning process. At the Learning Tree Academy this follow-up has been accomplished by providing one-on-one, in-house tutoring or referring applicants to programs which provide proven remedial education classes or individualized study options. Careful attention is given to avoiding programs which tend to "warehouse" students or use them merely to produce numbers with little regard for the students' welfare. While the staff of the North Star Academy will be directed on how and where to refer applicants who fail to meet the minimum requirements, it is not feasible to offer the same on-site, one-on-one tutoring for non-

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<sup>1</sup> - For admissions purposes an applicant will be considered to have a seventh grade reading level if she/he demonstrates understanding of the basic rules of pronunciation, is able to sound out multi-syllable words and possesses a commensurate vocabulary.

<sup>2</sup> - For admission purposes an applicant will be considered to exhibit a sixth grade writing ability if he/she can write complete sentences and is able to relate sentences to one another. (This does not necessarily mean being able to group sentences into paragraphs.)



enrolled students that is currently provided at the Learning Tree Academy. That service would greatly overtax the North Star Academy instructors who will already be asked to deal with longer school days and larger class sizes than the instructors at the Learning Tree Academy.

All admissions decisions will be made by an admissions team consisting of the Administrative Director, the Lead Instructor, and one other member of the educational or administrative staff to be determined by rotation. All appeals will be submitted in writing to a member of the admissions team or verbally in the presence of the full admissions team. The decisions of this team will be final except in cases where the applicant or his/her parents and one member of the admissions team and one other staff member file a special appeal petition with the Board of Trustees. In such cases the president of the Board of Trustees will name an ad hoc admissions appeals committee which will render a final decision. Until that admission appeals committee reaches a decision the decision of the admissions team will stand.

**A. Describe the admission methods and standards you will use to select students.**

#### **STANDARDS OF ADMISSIONS**

In addition to the minimum requirements for admissions consideration listed above, the admissions team for the North Star Academy will be assessing the following traits for all prospective applicants:

- 1) Ability to identify with the stated mission and academic objectives of the North Star Academy;
- 2) A clear commitment to his/her own academic success;
- 3) Access to a support network outside of school: parents, extended family, friends, non-family house mates, caseworkers, etc.;
- 4) Ability to learn from and adjust to new experiences and educational materials;
- 5) Willingness to pursue academic development both inside and outside the classroom;
- 6) A desire to pursue significant post-secondary academic/ career development (4-year college, junior/ community college, professional trade school or apprentice program)







7) A willingness to avoid any past, avoidable<sup>3</sup>, negative influences (gangs, drugs, disruptive friends, etc.).

The assessment of these traits will serve as the standard for admission into the North Star Academy. The assessment of these traits will focus on qualitative rather than quantitative measurements. In other words, the decision of the admissions team will not be "Does this applicant exhibit 4 or more of these traits?", rather the decision will revolve on the question "Does this applicant have a sufficient mix of any number of the traits to give her/him a minimum chance of successfully completing the program within 3-5 years?". Because the assessment of these traits can be very subjective, exact notes will be required from each member of the team regarding how they assessed those traits for each applicant. Any applicant and/or his/her parents will be able to review the notes for that applicant upon request.<sup>4</sup>

#### WHAT ARE THE ADMISSIONS PRIORITIES?

The focus of the admission process is directly related to the mission of the North Star Academy. The school is being established to provide a new model for educating inner-city youth, therefore inner-city youth from the home city of the North Star Academy will be given the highest priority in the admissions process.. The admissions priorities ranked in order of consideration will be; 1) applicants who are siblings of current North Star Academy or Learning Tree Academy students, 2) applicants who have been labeled at-risk of dropping-out of school [by school dept., self-labeled or parent(s) and one non-related adult] or who have already dropped out of the Springfield public schools, 3) applicants who are residents of the immediate census tract in which the North Star Academy Charter School is physically located and 4) all other applicants who are residents of Springfield & attending a public school. If necessary due to volume of applications, the drop-out applicants in the second priority grouping will be prioritized above the at-risk applicants since their need for educational intervention is more urgent. All applicants not falling into one of these categories will be considered non-priority applicants. This group will consist primarily of out-of-district applicants.

All application files completed on or before the established deadline will be grouped by priority category. Final eligibility

<sup>3</sup>. We recognize that it is not always possible for students to avoid all negative influences, especially if they are family members or lifelong friends. In those instances it is more realistic to help the student develop ways to minimize the impact of those influences.

<sup>4</sup>. In compliance with 603 CMR 23.01(1)-(3) all rights relating to student records will be exercised jointly by both the student and his/her parent(s) until the student turns 18 and provides a written request to reduce or eliminate the parent(s) exercise of these rights.





determinations will be done based on order of priority. Eligibility for all sibling applicants will be determined first followed by all at-risk or dropout applicants. Then eligibility will be decided for census tract residents, followed by all other Springfield residents and finally non-priority applicants. Available slots for each level within the North Star Academy will be offered based on priority groupings. In the event there are more applications than available slots separate lotteries will be held for those groups which require further prioritization.<sup>5</sup>

**B. Describe the process and timetable to be used for admitting students, including a plan for the admission lottery for students both within and outside the district.**

The method or process of selecting students for the North Star Academy will be similar to the process currently in place for the Learning Tree Academy. This three stage process is designed to gauge the applicant's demonstration of the admissions traits listed above. The first stage involves an initial, informal interview with one of the members of the admissions team. This interview is aimed at providing the prospective applicant with information about the focus of the school and the expectations that staff will have of all students. This initial interview will also be used to collect some basic information from the prospective applicant about his/her expectations of the school, post-secondary goals and prior classroom experiences. The team member conducting the interview will do a preliminary assessment of whether the prospective applicant has the required reading skills and whether she/he has completed or will complete the eighth grade or an equivalent level of education prior to the conclusion of the admissions process. If these two conditions are met the interviewer will give the prospective applicant a formal admissions application and schedule them for a return visit to complete stage two of the application process.

The second stage of the admissions process will focus on skills assessment. During his/her return visit each admissions candidate will be asked to read 3-4 short sample pieces ranging in difficulty from middle/ junior high school (6-7 grade) to secondary (high school) to collegiate levels. Each applicant will then be asked to provide a written response to one of a set of questions selected by the admissions team. The third component of

<sup>5</sup> - For example, if for the 45 first year Level I slots there are 5 eligible sibling applicants, 15 eligible at-risk or dropout applicants, 15 eligible census tract residents, 15 eligible Springfield applicants and 10 eligible non-priority applicants. The sibling, at-risk/dropout applicants and census tract applicants would all automatically be offered slots. There would be separate lotteries for the other Springfield residents and the non-priority applicants. The first ten names drawn in the lottery for other Springfield residents would also be offered slots. The remaining applicants in that lottery would be placed on the waiting list in the order drawn. The non-priority lottery would then be held with the first name drawn becoming the sixth name on the waiting list. Each following name would be added to the waiting list in order.





stage two will be the administration of a standardized test/evaluation. Initially, this test/evaluation will be modeled after the Mass. GED test and will include some sections of questions drawn directly from sample GED tests. Once the school becomes an active participant in the Mass. Basic Skills Program the North Star Academy's admissions evaluation will be modeled in part after that test as well. The reasoning here is not to "select for success", rather we will be looking to measure the skill levels of the applicants through the use of a "yardstick" which they must eventually face whether they enroll in the North Star Academy or not. The admissions application must be submitted before the deadline for the end of stage two.

The results of the first two components in the second stage of the admissions process will be used both to determine eligibility and to determine possible placement within the North Star Academy. The results of the third component will be used only to determine placement if the applicant is given an admissions offer. To ensure that the results of the evaluation do not become a factor in the admissions team's decision the evaluations will be reviewed by staff members not on the team and stored separately until eligibility determinations are made and the admissions team is ready to begin assigning slots.

The third and most critical stage in the admissions process will consist of a series of formal interviews. First there will be a second interview with the same admissions team member who conducted the informal interview in stage 1. (This interview may be waived if both the applicant and the interviewer agree that the initial informal interview was sufficient to make a fair assessment of the applicant.) Next will come another formal interview with a second member of the admissions team. The notes from these two interviews will be shared with the remaining team member. The goal of these interviews will be to determine the level of commitment the applicant has to pursuing her/his education. The interviewers will also attempt to ascertain whether the applicant is a suitable fit with the mission and admission philosophies of the North Star Academy.

The final piece of the third stage, which will be added for the North Star Academy only is a family/household interview. This will entail having a member of the admissions team meet with the applicant and his/her family/household/support persons to assess the levels of support for the applicant. (This interview may take place at the home of the applicant or at the North Star Academy at the choice of the applicant. The applicant will also have a choice in who participates in this interview. Ideally, the person who is likely to serve as the applicant's P.O.S. person should be present.) The interviewer will be looking to assess several dimensions of support which a family/household/support network might provide: spiritual, religious, intellectual, material, emotional and/or financial. Once each applicant has completed this





three stage process, his/her complete portfolio will be reviewed by the full admissions team to determine if the applicant is eligible to receive an admissions offer.

### WHAT IS THE TIMETABLE FOR THE ADMISSION PROCESS?

Because the educational staff will be granted a major role in the admissions process it must be stretched out longer than it would be if only the administrative staff were involved. The classroom demands of the educational staff will always take precedence over their admissions responsibilities. The projected timetable for the annual admissions process is:<sup>6</sup>

<u>Stage of Process</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
Marketing of the North Star Academy & Recruiting of Applicants	January 1 <sup>st</sup> - February 28 <sup>th</sup>
Stage 1 Completed	April 1 <sup>st</sup>
Stage 2 Completed	May 1 <sup>st</sup>
Stage 3 Completed	July 14 <sup>th</sup>
Admissions Eligibility Determination	July 21 <sup>st</sup>
Admissions Lotteries (If necessary)	August 1 <sup>st</sup>

Because the admissions process will not conclude until 3-4 weeks before the start of the new school year, all applicants who are still enrolled in the public school system will be advised to proceed with their enrollment plans in that system (choosing a school, picking classes and reserving a bus pass). Those who are selected for the North Star Academy will be reminded at the start of the school year to notify their last school that they will be transferring to the North Star Academy.

The waiting list produced by the lotteries will be used to fill any vacancies which occur during the first three weeks of each semester. No new enrollments will take place after the third week of courses (or 12<sup>th</sup> instructional day) in each semester. All applicants still on the waiting list after the third week of spring courses must reapply to be considered for admission the following year. Stage two of the process and the family/household

<sup>6</sup> - This timetable will have to be adjusted for the first year's admissions process. The admissions deadlines for the first year start-up is included in the overall start-up time line on page





interview may be waived at the discretion of the applicant and/or the admissions team.

#### HOW WILL THE LOTTERIES BE CONDUCTED?

As stated above, if the volume of application makes a lottery stage necessary there will be separate lotteries for the separate admissions priority groups. The North Star Academy will utilize the Public Access Program of Continental Cablevision in order to reach the broadest possible audience and to further publicize the school. By conducting the lotteries in this manner three distinct goals will be accomplished. First, and most important, the students get a chance to see their names used in a positive and uplifting way. Prior experiences with talent shows, awards ceremonies and community programs has demonstrated that even the most "hardcore" young people get a charge out of being involved in highly publicized events which make them feel worthwhile.

Secondly, having the lotteries on television allows for greater exposure for the charter school. Lastly, this method eliminates the possibility of anyone asserting that the admission lotteries are not legitimate. In a city where slots in youth programs are often granted based on favoritism and familial connections, avoiding even the perception of such behavior can be critical to the success of a new youth program. This is even more true for programs, like the North Star Academy, which are targeting hard-to-serve youth who will quickly become critical of anything which they feel is not 100% "legit".

Both the Executive Director and Deputy Director of the Western Mass. Learning Tree, Inc. are certified public access producers. Both also have at least two years of experience working through the Continental Cablevision Public Access Program.

Arrangements will be made to have the admissions lotteries televised live. All eligible applicants will be notified by mail of the time and place of the lotteries. Each applicant who receives a slot will be introduced in person before the studio and television audience. In years where no lottery stage is necessary the show will be used to introduce each new student and allow them to answer one or two questions.

#### **C. Explain how these policies further the mission of the school in a non-discriminatory fashion.**

A major part of the mission for the North Star Academy is to present a model for educating inner-city populations that are currently falling through the cracks of the present system. The admissions policy for this charter school has been formulated to attract and enroll those students while at the same time making it possible for students who are doing well under the current system



'to also gain admission. The policy makes a clear statement to those students who have been pushed out or to the margins in the three traditional high schools that they are welcomed and wanted at the North Star Academy.





## TIMETABLE

### TIME LINE FOR THE OPENING OF THE NORTH STAR ACADEMY (First year in a donated facility)

Limited initial printing of marketing, recruitment and admissions materials	March 1, 1995
Begin identifying potential applicants from existing referrals and waiting list	March 1, 1995
Confirm Board of Trustees designates	March 13, 1995
CHARTER AWARDED	March 15, 1995
Board of Trustees officially installed	March 16, 1995
Administrative Director officially named (Press conference to also serve as a marketing event)	March 17, 1995
Begin financing drive for permanent site of North Star Academy	March 17, 1995
Kick-off marketing and recruitment drive	March 17, 1995
Management agreement with Western Mass. Learning Tree finalized.	March 24, 1995
Lead Instructor officially named	March 27, 1995
Remainder of educational staff selected	March 31, 1995
Confirm and request inspection of donated, first-year facility	April 10, 1995
Last day Stage 1 interviews will be allowed (Two week extension on regular deadline)	April 14, 1995
Last day to complete Stage 2 of admissions process	May 12, 1995
Last day Stage 3 interviews will be allowed	July 14, 1995
Required renovations and repairs to first-year facility completed	July 17, 1995
Final inspection of first-year facility	July 18-20, 1995
Administrative Director and Lead Instructor transfer to first-year facility	July 21, 1995
Furnishings and supplies delivered for	





' first-year facility	July 24, 1995
Transitional admissions team makes final eligibility decisions	July 28, 1995
Educational staff start work & pre-service training/orientation	July 31, 1995
Admissions lotteries (if necessary)	August 11, 1995
Remaining staff start work	August 25, 1995
Staff's annual training starts	August 28, 1995
Staff's annual training completed & instructor's pre-service completed	August 31, 1995
Student Orientation	September 1, 1995
FIRST DAY OF CLASSES	September 5, 1995

Presently, the Western Mass. Learning Tree is uniquely situated to effectively accommodate the short start-up time for schools approved in this round of applications. The L.T. Academy is presently involved with identifying a person to fill part-time teaching and administrative positions in January. As a result the agency will already have a current listing of qualified educational staff and administrative staff candidates. The agency's current affiliation with Springfield College makes the donation of first-year space very likely. Much of the first year teaching curriculums can be adapted from materials already in use with the L.T. Academy. Forthcoming computer donations from Aetna, Mass. Mutual, the Mass. Corp. for Educational Telecommunications (MCET), the Computers 4 Kids Foundation and others will facilitate a quick computer lab start-up.



## EVIDENCE OF SUPPORT

### A. Try to convey as clearly as possible the scope of community backing for the proposed charter school.

During its six years of existence the Western Mass. Learning Tree, Inc. has generated substantial community support for its alternative educational programs. During the organization's first three years space was provided by the United Church of Christ. As a testament to the quality of its programming, in 1991 the agency forged its first college partnership; the James Baldwin Scholars Program at Hampshire College. In 1992 the new president of Springfield College provided the use of an off campus facility to house the agency and its programs. That affiliation has given rise to the agency's second college partnership; the Community Teachers Partnership. The agency has fostered a solid working relationship with the Superintendent of Public Schools, Dr. Peter Negroni, to the point where the Springfield School System currently funds a part-time teaching position for the Learning Tree Academy.

Further evidence of support can be seen in the more than \$300,000 raised annually from national, regional and local donors. Recently when the Education Department of Westfield State College was looking for community agencies to join them in the Health Links Project run by the Mass. Corp. for Educational Telecommunications, they called on the Western Mass. Learning Tree, Inc. The agency has received repeated funding support from area foundations most notable the Community Coalition of Western Mass. and the Western Mass. chapter of the Haymarket Peoples fund. The list of foundations and businesses which have supported the Western Mass. Learning Tree includes; the Amelia Peabody Foundation and Jesse B. Cox Charitable Trust of Boston, the Public Welfare Foundation (a private foundation) of Washington D.C., the Frank Stanley Beveridge Foundation of Florida, the Joukowsky Family Foundation and the Edwards Foundation of New York, the Tides Foundation and the Threshold Foundation of San Francisco, the Aetna Foundation of Hartford, Mirage Studios (the Ninja Turtles creators) of Northampton, MA, the Service League Foundation of Springfield and hundreds of local businesses and individual donors.

An established screenwriter from Northampton, Eric Lerner, donates time as the writing instructor and Education Director. A successful, retired, business lawyer, Ned Barry, donates time as the business instructor. This year alone more than half-a-dozen young women who are friends of current L.T. Academy students have inquired about the L.T. Academy and were greatly disappointed to find that it is males only. They will probably be among the first in line to attend the North Star Academy.

Support has already begun to develop for the idea of the North Star Academy. The Davis Foundation, an education oriented





'foundation attached to American Saw East Longmeadow has encouraged us to apply for a Charter School Grant, implying that they will be open to supporting a Western Mass. Learning Tree, Inc. sponsored charter school. The Bank of Western Mass. has expressed interest in assisting with both the financial planning and contracting of services at affordable rates. Current and former participants have expressed interest in volunteering their help.

**B. In tangible terms demonstrate this community support among teachers, parents, students, community leaders and others.**

In addition to letters of support for the North Star Academy, we have attached letters of support for the educational work of the Western Mass. Learning Tree, Inc.. These letters and feature articles from the Boston Globe, the Daily Hampshire Gazette, the Springfield Union News and Business West are included in the Appendix of this application.



## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The educational program for the North Star Academy will be based on two fundamental, driving beliefs:

- 1) Any student who can learn to read and write effectively is capable of building her/his skills up to the collegiate level if given the proper mix of encouragement, instruction, skill development, reinforcement, support and opportunities for self-realization.
- 2) The skills and learning methods which have determined academic and "real" world success for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will not be effective or relevant as our society moves into a new era and a new millennium.

The North Star Academy will be driven in large part by these beliefs. We believe that this society is undergoing a paradigm shift comparable to the shifts from a pioneer culture to an agrarian culture to an industrial/manufacturing culture. We believe that the dawning culture will be based on ability to access, analyze and utilize information just as the outgoing culture was based on accessing, analyzing and utilizing material resources. Many people mistakenly label this dawning culture as a "high tech." culture. While it is true that technological advances have greatly accelerated this transition, it is a shift which would have eventually arrived under its own steam. As we learned more about ourselves as a race, our planet and our universe, information access, analysis and utilization was destined to move into the forefront.

The North Star Academy will serve as a site for equipping our youth to function in this new era. The approach to be used in all courses will emphasize individual development and realization along with information management. The North Star Academy will strive to prepare inner-city students, who often have limited access to limited resources, to compete on an equal footing with students who have the benefit of access to greater resources.

**A. Describe the educational program of the school, providing a detailed overview of curriculum objectives and content in the main subject areas.**

### STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM

The North Star Academy will divide students into three levels (forty-five regular slots per level) that are based on skill development. All 50 students admitted during the first year will enroll in Level I. Students admitted during the second year may enroll in Level I or II. In the third and subsequent years





students may be admitted into all three levels. Because it is anticipated that a majority of the students will progress through the levels in a timely manner (one year per level), most new enrollments each year will be at Level I.

The success of the admissions team in choosing students who are committed to their own learning experience will be critical to the success of this system. Again it must be stressed that the admission team will not be selecting only the top performing applicants. Simply put, they will be looking for those applicants who at least think they want to learn and are willing to put some effort into doing so. This will not rule out all at-risk students, rather it will constructively engage those who have rejected the traditional classroom because it is not relevant to their lives.

### WHY LEVELS INSTEAD OF GRADES?

In traditional secondary schools students move from one grade to the next after they have taken and "passed" a certain number of classes. This model of student advancement does not address the development of the student's skills or knowledge in particular areas of study. Increasingly students are arriving at the end of their senior year with "decent" grades but lacking the skills to succeed in college or in the "real" world.

In developing the Learning Tree Academy and now the North Star Academy the staff of the Western Mass. Learning Tree have realized the need for a better model which ensures that those students who exit the program are fully prepared to move on to the next level. The levels in the North Star Academy will be based on development and demonstration of specific skills. Moving from one level to the next will not simply entail adequately completing classes. The students will have to demonstrate that they have acquired certain skills and are ready to move on.

To use a conceptual frame to which many youth can relate, the levels will function similar to the levels in most video games. You must not only survive the level, you must also complete the challenge stage at the end of each level. To use a conceptual frame to which many educators may relate, the levels will function similar to the division concept employed at Hampshire College in Amherst, MA. Each division requires an increasingly interdisciplinary approach to learning. To move up to the next division, the student must submit a synopsis of work already done, a request to begin the next division and a plan for their work in the next division.

### HOW WILL THE LEVEL SYSTEM FUNCTION?

The levels will be viewed as levels of student engagement



'rather than levels of learning. Each level of student engagement will carry increasing expectations in terms of skill utilization. The skills to be emphasized, courses and exit requirements for each level are given in the charts on the following pages:





Level I Skills Learned	Level I - Courses	Level I - Evaluation
Typing proficiency	Tree Skills (Fall Only)	Written request to move on to next level.
Reading proficiency & comprehension	Language Usage (Full Year)	A 3-5 page essay on topic determined by faculty
Notetaking	Mathematics (Full Year - Two Sections)	Make a 5 min. presentation of ideas in essay and respond to questions from faculty about reasons behind choices made while writing essay.
Time Management	Computer Skills and Exploration (Full Year)	Submit printouts detailing extent of computer use during year.
Personal Organization	The Basics of Writing (Spring Only)	
Building Vocabulary	Social Studies (Spring Only)	
Basic Writing Proficiency	Sociology (Spring Only)	
Basic Information Analysis		
Choosing a Career		

Level II Skills Learned	Level II - Courses	Level II - Evaluation
Typing Proficiency	Compositions (Full Year)	Submit a written request to move to Level III & justify request before faculty
Reading Comprehension & Analysis	Mathematics (Full Year - Two Sections)	Submit a 5-7 page essay on topic of student's choosing
Choosing Career Options	Computer Skills and Exploration (Full Year)	Make a 10 minute presentation on essay topic & respond to questions from faculty & Level II peers. (Will allow questions on both choices and content of presentation.)
Critical Thinking	Social Studies (Full Year)	Submit printouts detailing extent of computer work for year.
Analytic Problem Solving	Psychology (Fall Only)	
Basic & Algebraic Math	Sociology (Spring Only)	
Intermediate Writing Proficiency	Science & Health Issues (Full Year)	
Intermediate Computer Skills	Preparing for the SAT (Spring Only)	
Standardized Testing		





Level III Skills Learned	Level III - Courses	Level III - Graduation Evaluation
Typing proficiency	Standardized Testing (Fall Only)	Submit written request to graduate with post-graduation plan to be defended before faculty.
Research Methods	College Preparations (Full Year)	Complete 15-20 page Research paper on a topic of the student's choice.
Use of Multimedia Resources	Mathematics (Full Year)	Make a 30 minute multi-media presentation of ideas in research paper and respond to questions from faculty and other candidates for graduation. Questions will focus on content, quality of research and implications of ideas in term paper.
Advanced Mathematics	Multi-media Communication (Spring Only)	Dialogue with faculty on a range of issues from any of the three levels of learning.
College Selection	Research Methods (Fall Only)	
Applying for Financial Aid for College	Level III Term Paper (Spring Only)	
	Science (Full Year)	
	Global Studies (Fall Only)	





B. What teaching methods will be used? How will this pedagogy enhance student learning?

## INSTRUCTION METHODS

The instruction methodologies to be used in the North Star Academy will be student-focused, socially relevant, open and honest. Instructors will be expected to first and foremost always paint an accurate picture for their students. If the current state of knowledge on a particular topic is inconclusive, they will share that with the students. Likewise, if the current knowledge contradicts or refutes the traditional texts, they will share that information with their students. Today's students are sophisticated enough to detect the difference between efforts to educate and efforts to indoctrinate. We feel that part of the acting-out, dropping-out and indifference on the part of students is a response to the heavy doses of indoctrination which accompany most school texts.

This methodology may be difficult for instructors who are former teachers, especially those who worked in the public schools and/or come from suburban backgrounds. Most of their professional training and personal experience will have conditioned them to teach just the standard text. We will be asking them to perform what Paulo Freire describes as "committing class suicide" in his book Pedagogy in Process. They will have to completely abandon their former academic/professional roles and take-up a whole-hearted commitment to the aspirations and potential of the students they will be educating.

Secondly, all staff will be expected to make all student encounters constructive in nature. This will apply to everyone from the Administrative Director to the custodian. Staff members will be expected to individually engage students using what is often called the Socratic method.<sup>7</sup> This approach involves the use of probing questions and parables to raise the consciousness of the audience. This method takes many forms in today's educational marketplace; student-centered learning, cyber-learning, Afro-centric learning, multicultural education, etc. However, the primary goal is the same: to produce students capable of analyzing and responding to the world around them. Instead of chastising students for undesired behaviors, staff will be expected to encourage the students into reconsidering their behaviors. Naturally, applying this approach will not be possible in all situations, but it can and will become the norm for the North Star Academy.

Finally, three instructors will be assigned as a team to an incoming group of Level I students and will remain with that group

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<sup>7</sup> - Some would argue that this method of engagement pre-dates the life of Socrates. However, for this discourse it is referred to as the Socratic Method since that is how it is most widely recognized.





' until the majority of them complete Level III. Inherent in this approach is the idea that if more than half of the students "stay back" at least two of the instructors "stay back" as well. This will provide motivation for instructors to reevaluate their educational approach, their course materials and their classroom delivery in the event more than half of their students fail to change levels.

On the positive side, this approach will allow instructors the opportunity to personally see students grow intellectually. Instructors will be able to experience the full development of each of their students, rather than hearing from another instructor how far "Joe" came from his first year. Watching individual students go from potential dropout to matriculating college freshman will serve as an additional source of motivation for the instructors. It will also allow the instructors a chance to become familiar with the family and personal situations of each student. Knowledge of what a student is experiencing outside the classroom can provide valuable insight into why he/she is performing at a particular level and/or insight on how to better educate a particular student.

For the students it will provide consistency and a chance to develop a strong academic relationship with their instructors. In working with students in the existing Learning Tree program, most of whom were at some point considered at-risk or unteachable, we have come to realize that one of the major factors behind the increasing dropout rates for the Springfield public schools is the feeling that teachers don't care about students. However, teachers are not entirely to blame for this. Under the current public school model most teachers will see a group of students for one semester, or at most two. This, coupled with the fact that during an average day one teacher may see as many as five different groups of students, does not create an environment where substantial relationships are fostered. By keeping students with the same instructors for 3-5 years time is available for relationships to develop not only with students but with entire households.

#### HOW WILL THIS METHODOLOGY BE IMPLEMENTED?

Prior to the start of each academic year all staff members (administrative and auxiliary staff included) will participate in a one-week, ten-hour training designed to reinforce these philosophies and provide practical methods for implementing these philosophies in the various courses and all other student encounters. The training will include outside speakers, insights from those staff member with experience using those approaches and role playing exercises intended to encourage newer staff members to begin developing their own interpretation of these philosophies. Throughout the year the staff will attend or present





conferences/ in-services which will elaborate on these approaches. In addition, each Friday afternoon will include a one-hour mini-in-service devoted to giving the instructors time to work on further reinforcing those philosophies.

#### WHAT TEACHING MATERIALS WILL BE USED?

Although the primary focus in all courses is to be on skill development, the content of the courses cannot be ignored. We have found that the content, if chosen correctly, can become an intellectual "foot-in-the-door". By selecting materials which are culturally and socially relevant it becomes easier to engage the students in an exploration of the skills necessary to fully appreciate the materials. For this same reason it is important to regularly update the instructional materials for each course. This approach to course content makes the purchase of textbooks on a large scale impractical. Limited purchases of textbooks will take place for those subjects which are difficult to teach otherwise. Textbooks will be purchased mainly as a resource for instructors in developing their lesson plans. Lesson materials will also come from non-academic books, journals, magazines, newspapers and other printed materials.

A major teaching tool in the North Star Academy will be computers. Students will utilize computers in the development of many of their skills. It will be mandatory to type all assignments after the first semester in the program. As a result students will spend a great deal of time using the word processing software. Computers will be integrated into the curriculum in math and science. There will also be a separate course in computer skills and using the computer as an information management tool.

During the 1995-96 and 1996-97 academic years, the Learning Tree Academy has been approved to participate in the Health Links Project designed by the Mass. Corporation for Educational Telecommunications. The goal of this project is to "use telecommunications and other educational technologies in schools and community-based educational settings to help at-risk adolescents and young adults access the resources to develop the skills necessary for social, economic and physical well-being." The project will offer access to a range of on-line information, on-disk programs and CD-ROM programs as well as educational broadcast and live video conferences. A copy of the Executive Summary for the Health Links Project is included in the Appendix. We have already discussed expanding that participation to include the North Star Academy.

**C. Describe the school calendar and hours of operation of the school.**





## 'SCHOOL CALENDAR

The North Star Academy will operate on a 40 week academic calendar beginning with the first week of September (Tuesday after Labor Day) and concluding with the last week of June. Students will receive 4-7 school days off for the Christmas/New Year holidays and four days off for a spring break beginning the third Monday of March. In addition students will receive a day off for the following holidays:

Labor Day	Martin Luther King Day
Columbus Day	Presidents' Day
Veterans' Day	Patriots' Day
Thanksgiving Day	Memorial Day

## HOURS OF OPERATION

The courses at the North Star Academy will run Monday through Thursday from 9:00 am until 5:00 pm. The last two hours of each school day will be runs as a knowledge application session. Instructors will use this time to work closely with students who need help, while the back-up/substitute teacher will assist with the work of the remaining students in each level. This time is critical to the learning process the North Star Academy will seek to foster. It is during this time that instructors will be able to work with students to take the information acquired in the classroom and begin to apply it and develop a personalized understanding of it.

Fridays will be structured to provide a variety of non-academic learning experiences for the students. One Friday of each month will be set aside for the student assembly in the morning and a movie in the afternoon. The monthly movie will be selected by the educational team for each level and will be used as material for future assignments. Another Friday of each month will be set aside for a cultural, civic or other consciousness raising excursion selected separately by the educational team for each level. For the remaining 2-3 Fridays in each month the students will have the option of engaging in a structured community-service project, completing and un-paid internship or assisting with the maintenance of the North Star Academy's facilities. Every Friday students will have the option of remaining on-site to engage in supervised academic activities such as completing assignments, doing extra work & research or exploring in the computer lab. Any extra-curricular activities which students might organize that require meeting or practice times will be restricted to Fridays. Parents, college interns and community volunteers will be recruited to chaperone/supervise all Friday activities.

This schedule exceeds the minimum instructional hours requirement [603 CMR 27.02(2)] by 130 hours. It also exceeds the length of school day requirements [603 CMR 27.01(1)] by 1.5 hours



' per day. However, it falls short of the 180 day requirement[603 CMR 27.02(3)]. The current calendar includes only 160 in-class days. If a charter is granted, the North Star Academy will request a waiver of 603 CMR 27.02 (3).





## **STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

We at the Western Mass. Learning Tree, Inc. feel that evaluating student performance is an ongoing process which does not stop until they are able to do the evaluation on their own. We feel that grades by themselves cannot fully convey the nuances of the learning experience. Grades do not call the student's attention to the specific areas where he/she needs to improve. However, at the same time we also recognize that the education mentality of our society is such that most people, most notably college admissions officers, have a difficult time swallowing the concept of courses with no grading system. The evaluation system described below is an attempt to bridge the gap between those two views on evaluating academic performance.

### **A. Describe your proposed plan to assess student performance.**

#### **COURSE AND LEVEL EVALUATIONS**

The evaluation process for each course will include both process and summative elements. The instructors will maintain a file of bi-weekly process evaluations for all students. These bi-weekly process evaluations will be used to compile mid-semester and final summative evaluations for each student. The mid-semester and final summative evaluations will become part of the student's record as defined by 603 CMR 23.02. The weekly process evaluations will remain with the instructor (per 603 CMR 23.04) and will be destroyed after the student completes the next highest level. Level III bi-weekly evaluations will be destroyed two years after graduation. Copies of the proposed forms for the weekly process evaluations and summative evaluations are included in the Appendix.

After the instructors complete the bi-weekly evaluation forms a copy will be given to each student who will be given the opportunity to ask questions about their evaluation and receive feedback directly from the instructor. Again these bi-weekly evaluations will not become a part of the student's record, they will be treated as instructor's notes and as such may only be accessed by the members of the educational staff. Because administrative staff and other third parties are prohibited from assessing records which are part of the instructor's personal files, the students and/or their parents must make arrangements with the educational staff to review these forms after the initial feedback opportunity.

Instructors will not wait until the mid-semester evaluation period to provide critical feedback to under-performing students and/or their parents. If at any point after the second week of courses until the end of each semester a student's performance





, begins to drop below acceptable levels the instructor will first schedule a feedback session with the student. If there is no improvement within two weeks, a follow-up session will be scheduled with the student and his/her primary academic support (P.A.S.) person to review the issues discussed during the first meeting, to discuss any possible outside/home problems which might be affecting the student's work and to develop a plan for improving the performance of the student.

In most cases this will be a parent or legal guardian, however, there will also be caseworkers, other relatives, significant others and close friends who will fill that role for some students, especially those who are seventeen and older. The point is that the instructor will have to know the students and her/his situation outside of school well enough to identify the primary outside support person. For all students who have a P.A.S. person other than their parent/legal guardian a consent form will be signed by the appropriate parties acknowledging that P.A.S. person and authorizing the school to share the student's records with that person (per 603 CMR 23.07(4)).

If there is still no improvement two weeks after the meeting with the student and her/his P.A.S. person, the student will be assigned to mandatory tutoring outside school hours with one of the back-up teachers. Failure to comply with this arrangement will result in the student being assigned extra work (to demonstrate that he/she is still committed to his/her own learning) and being required to undergo an assessment for possible learning disabilities. (Past experiences dictate that a student's resistance to one-on-one help is often an attempt to hide learning problems which the student may or may not be conscious of.) Further failure to comply with these and previous terms will result in a short term suspension. At this point it becomes reasonable to assume that the student has for some reason lost interest in her/his learning process. The staff of the North Star Academy will make every effort to discover the underlying reasons for this loss of interest. However, continued non-compliance may result in long-term suspension and/or expulsion. Students will be given the opportunity to transfer to another school before long-term suspension or expulsion proceedings are initiated.

#### WHAT ABOUT GRADES?

In each course the students will receive a mid-semester and final "grade" for their work in each course. This grading system will have two components, therefore the students will receive two mid-semester "grades" and two final "grades" for each course. The first "grade" will reflect the student's mastery of the course materials and content. The second "grade" will reflect the level of skill utilization and knowledge application the student demonstrated in the class. The skill utilization assessment will be based only on those skills which have been covered in the





overall curriculum at the time of the "grade" assessment. This system will provide college admissions officers, parents and others with the grades they are expecting a student's academic records to carry. However, they will still have to look at the student's performance in each course separately as the grades will be somewhat subjective. Each report card and transcript issued will carry the following note:

PLEASE NOTE: The grades which appear on this form are intended to provide a representation of this student's academic track record only. They should not be averaged or otherwise collectively considered as this grading system is not designed or intended to be used in that manner. Each grade represents the level of performance in the indicated area of evaluation for each course. No further inferences are intended or should be drawn.

(Because each student will remain with the same team of instructors throughout most of their time at the North Star Academy, there will in reality be a great deal of consistency between the grades for each course because the instructors will always bring the same set of expectations and sensitivities to the process. However, because we want to encourage the practice of looking at course performance separately, the note will always be included on all transcripts. )

#### **B. What remediation will be available for underperforming students?**

Students who are underperforming will receive greater individual attention from the instructors during knowledge application sessions. The student's instructional team and/or the administrative staff will make contact with the student's household to determine if there are outside issues which may be contributing to student's poor performance. If there are significant outside issues which are affecting the student's performance the instructor will begin noting that on the weekly evaluations and will make any reasonable adjustments which are deemed appropriate to the student's mid-semester and/or final evaluations/grades. NO MENTION OF OUTSIDE/PERSONAL ISSUES WILL OCCUR ON THE MID-SEMESTER AND/OR FINAL EVALUATIONS SINCE THESE WILL BECOME PART OF THE STUDENT'S RECORD. Adjusting grades/evaluations to account for personal problems is nothing new. Many teachers in the public schools do this on an informal basis for students with whom they have developed a close relationship. By formalizing this process, the North Star Academy will ensure that all students get the benefit of this practice equitably.

For those students who continue to under perform for longer than one month, the staff will locate an individual tutor or





'assign one of the back-up instructors for that student's level to work with them one-on-one outside of school hours in addition to the increased attention she/he will receive during the knowledge application sessions.

**C. How will student development towards the school's stated learning objectives be measured?**

#### **YEAR-END REVIEWS AND STATE TESTING**

The progress of each student towards the final graduation objectives will be measured by year-end evaluations. These year-end evaluations will include not only evaluations from the individual courses, they will also look at the student's ability or inability to complete the exit requirements for their current level. (See charts under EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM)

In addition, the North Star Academy will participate in the Massachusetts Education Assessment Program (M.E.A.P.) and the Massachusetts Basic Skills Testing Program. Level II & III students will participate in M.E.A.P. while Level I students will participate in the Mass. Basic Skills Testing Program. As required by state regulations, any Level I student who does not meet the state standard in any area(s) of the Basic Skills Test will be re-tested the following year.





## ACCOUNTABILITY

**A. What methods of self-assessment or evaluation will be used to ensure that the school is meeting its stated mission and objectives?**

Each year the staff will conduct a self-assessment that will focus on how well the educational and demonstration objectives were accomplished. This assessment will cover all areas of operation within the charter school. The results will be made available as a supplement to the school's annual report.

**B. How will teachers and administrators be evaluated? Describe your standards for teacher and staff performance.**

The Administrative Director of the North Star Academy will be hired on a five year contract and may be dismissed by either the Board of Trustees of the North Star Academy or the Executive Director of the Western Mass. Learning Tree. Dismissal of the Administrative Director by the Board of Trustees shall not terminate the management agreement with the Western Mass. Learning Tree nor shall it affect the employment status of that person as an employee of the Western Mass. Learning Tree. Only his/her association with the North Star Academy shall be affected. Both the Board of Trustees and the WMLT Executive Director will be responsible for conducting separate, annual evaluations of the Administrative Director.

The members of the educational staff will undergo three annual evaluations. First each instructor will be individually evaluated by the Lead Instructor who in turn will be evaluated individually by the Administrative Director. Secondly, each team will be evaluated by their peers on the other team(s). (For the first year the Administrative Director will evaluate the one instructional team which will include the Lead Instructor.) Thirdly, the educational team for each level will receive a group evaluation from the students in each level in the form of individual surveys. Instructors will be hired on contracts negotiated by the Administrative Director and approved by the Board of Trustees. As such they will be employees of only the North Star Academy. The contracts will be one year in duration for their first two years of employment and three years in duration thereafter. In the event that the educational staff should form or join a union any employment agreements with that union will serve as a minimum contract and will still be subject to individual negotiation at the choice of each instructor.

All staff members will have one standard of performance. That standard will be:

All employees, volunteers, trustees and affiliated individuals will be expected to conduct themselves in a manner which is firstly supportive of the needs and academic development of the students of the North Star Academy and secondly





supportive of the mission and objectives of the North Star Academy.

As suggested by this statement, the interest of the students will always come first. If an instructor genuinely feel that a student would be better served at another school he/she will be expected to share that feeling with the students and her/his guardians and to assist the student in completing the transfer. Likewise if an instructor feels that a student has been dealt with unfairly or inequitably and cannot obtain a suitable resolution for the North Star Academy he/she cannot be fired or disciplined for assisting that student in pursuing a grievance as long, as he/she does not act in a manner which unduly damages the North Star Academy.

**C. How do you plan to hold your school accountable to the public and the parents of the children in attendance at your school?**

All parents and p.a.s. persons will be asked to complete either a telephone or written annual, satisfaction survey. The school will also host two, semi-annual, public speak-outs to gather feedback from the larger community about the charter school's performance and overall impact in the community. The results of this public feedback, the students' surveys of the educational teams and the parents' surveys of the school in general will be included in the supplement to the school's annual report.

**D. Discuss your plan for regular review of school budgets and financial records.**

Budget review will occur on five levels. First all spending authorization will come directly from the Administrative Director. Secondly, the Administrative Director will receive monthly budget reports from the bookkeeper. Thirdly the Administrative Director will be responsible for providing quarterly fiscal reports to the Board of Trustees for the North Star Academy and the Executive Director and of the Western Mass. Learning Tree, Inc.. Finally the budgets and financial records of the North Star Academy will undergo quarterly audits by the Western Mass. Learning Tree, Inc. and an annual audit by an independent accounting firm.

**E. Describe your system for maintaining school records and disseminating information required under public school law, including the annual report.**

All school records will be maintained in a computerized database and as hard copies in the administrative offices of the North Star Academy.

Upon entering the North Star Academy the mailing information for each student and his/her parent(s)/guardian(s) will be entered into a computerized database which will be used to generate





mailing lists for disseminating all required information and copies of the annual report. Individuals who attend the semi-annual public speak-outs will be given the opportunity to add their names to a separate mailing list. Copies of the annual report will be available to the public year-round in the administrative offices of the North Star Academy and at the semiannual public speak-outs.





## **HUMAN RESOURCE INFORMATION**

### **A. Describe the standards to be used in the hiring process.**

All staff recruitment will take place in a manner that is consistent with the marketing plan for the North Star Academy. The specific standards for each position will be as follows:

Administrative Director: 3 - 5 years administrative and supervisory experience. Demonstrated ability to relate to and work with targeted student population.

Willingness to make a total personal commitment to the operation and development of the North Star Academy.

Lead Instructor: Demonstrated ability to relate to and educate individuals in the targeted student population based on prior work experience or academic preparation. Prior experience educating hard-to-serve, inner-city youth required. Prior supervisory experience preferred. Prior employment with an alternative educational program preferred.

Instructors: Demonstrated ability to relate to and educate individuals in the targeted student population based on prior work experience or academic preparation. Prior experience educating hard-to-serve, inner-city youth preferred.

Administrative Assistants: Prior experience with public school or alternative school administrative positions or relevant academic preparation. Ability to do bookkeeping required. Ability and willingness to substitute for educational staff preferred. Willingness to commit to assisting in overall operation of the North Star Academy required.

Auxiliary staff: Relevant work experience, training or academic preparation for specific job title. Willingness to commit to the North Star Academy's philosophy of student engagement required.

### **B. What is the target staff size and teacher/student ratio?**

The instructor/student ratio for the North Star Academy will be 1:15. The presence of back-up teachers during the Supervised Study times will drop the ratio to 1:9 during that section of the school day.

Projected staffing patterns for the North Star Academy during



the first three years of operation will be as follows:

First year:

Administrative Staff

Administrative Director (Full-time)

Administrative Assistant(s) (1 - Part-time)

Educational Staff

Lead Instructor (Full-time)

Instructors (2 - Full-time)

Bilingual/Back-up Instructor (1 - Full-time)

Back-up Instructor(s) (1 - Part-time)

Auxiliary Staff

Food Service (1 - Part-time)

Custodian (1 - Part-time)

Second year:

Administrative Staff

Administrative Director (Full-time)

Administrative Assistant(s) (2 - Part-time)

Educational Staff

Lead Instructor (Full-time)

Instructor(s) (5 - Full-time)

Bilingual/Back-up Instructor (1 - Full-time)

Back-up Instructor(s) (3 - Part-time)

Auxiliary Staff

Cook(s) (1 - Part-time)

Custodian (2 - Part-time)

Third year:

Administrative Staff

Administrative Director (Full-time)

Administrative Assistant(s) (2 - Part-time)

Educational Staff

Lead Instructor (Full-time)

Instructor(s) (8 - Full-time)





Bilingual/Back-up Instructor (1 - Full-time)

Back-up Instructor(s) (5 - Part-time)

Auxiliary Staff

Cook(s) (2 - Part-time)

Custodian (2 - Part-time)

The staff size shall remain essentially the same from the third year on.

**C. What professional development opportunities will be available to teachers and other staff?**

The members of the educational staff will develop their own professional development program within the following parameters. All full-time educational staff will complete six (6) units of professional development per year. Back-up instructors will complete at least three (3) units of professional development per year. All units must be completed during working hours on Fridays or on the instructors' own time. For full-time instructors, no more than two (2) of their units may be outside in-services, conferences, workshops, classes, etc. For back-up instructors, no more than one (1) of their units may be outside in-services, conferences, workshops, classes, etc.. Funding for any outside professional development units must be approved by the Administrative Director in advance.

The educational staff will jointly organize 6 in-house professional development workshops (three (3) per semester) of their own choosing to be delivered each year. Each instructor may choose which workshops he/she will attend, but he/she must attend a total of four (4) of these workshops each year. Back-up instructors must attend a total of two (2) in-house workshops each year, however they may attend all six (6) if interested.

All other staff will be invited to participate in any in-house programs and will also be allowed 1 outside unit of professional development per year. Reimbursement for such units must be approved in advance by the Administrative Director.

**D. Describe your human resource policies governing: salaries, contracts, hiring, dismissal and benefit packages.**

The Administrative Director of the North Star Academy will be hired on a five year contract with salary and terms jointly negotiated by the Board of Trustees & the Executive Director of the Western Mass. Learning Tree, Inc. The Administrative Director





. may be dismissed by either the Board of Trustees of the North Star Academy or the Executive Director of the Western Mass. Learning Tree. (The first Administrative Director will be the current Deputy Director of the Western Mass. Learning Tree, Inc., Frank Thompson. His credentials are provided elsewhere in this application. He will be hired on a three year contract which will be subject to approval by the Board of Trustees after they are officially installed.)

The Lead Instructor of the North Star Academy will be hired on a five year contract with salary and terms negotiated by the Administrative Director and approved by the Board of Trustees. The Lead Instructor may be dismissed by the Board of Trustees or the Administrative Director.

Instructors will be hired on one-year contracts for their first two years of employment and on three-year contracts thereafter. The salary and terms shall be negotiated by the Administrative Director. In the event that the educational staff should form or join a union any agreements with that union will still be subject to individual negotiation at the choice of each instructor. Instructors may be dismissed with just cause by the Lead Instructor or the Administrative Director.

The terms of all other staff hiring shall be determined by the Administrative Director. Only full-time professional staff shall be eligible for benefits except where otherwise mandated by federal or state law.



## **SCHOOL GOVERNANCE**

### **A. Describe the internal form of management to be implemented at your school.**

The North Star Academy will exist as an autonomous corporate entity and will be subject to the rules and policies of its Articles of Organization, except where other procedures are mandated by state or federal regulations. The North Star Academy will utilize a team approach to management where all staff members are invited to provide feedback and input on the operation of the school. The staff will have bi-monthly, year-round meetings for this purpose.

The management of the educational program, including curriculum development, will be primarily a responsibility of the educational staff. The Administrative Director will be closely involved (and will serve as an additional back-up instructor) during the first three years as the curriculum precedents for each level of the program are implemented. After that time the Lead Instructor will assume sole responsibility for supervising curriculum development.

### **B. How will the board of trustees be chosen?**

The first Board of Trustees has been recruited by the Executive Director and Deputy Director of the Western Mass Learning Tree, Inc. and will have staggered terms of office. Afterwards all Board members will serve three year terms with approximately one third of the seats coming up for re-selection each year. the composition of the Board of trustees will be: 3 members with educational backgrounds, 2 members who are youth/community advocates, 2 members who are parents/guardians of current or former students, 2 North Star Academy students and 2 general/ at-large members. No Trustee may serve more than two consecutive terms or more than six in total.

Candidates for the at-large, education and youth/community seats may be nominated by any staff member or active trustee. All new members must be approved by a majority vote of the current Board of Trustees.

The parent/guardians seats and the student seats will be filled using a two step process. Candidates may be nominated by gaining the signatures of five or more other parents or students. Nominations will be collected by the Admin. Dir. and compiled to make ballots which will be mailed to all parents/guardians for the parent/guardian seats and delivered to students in-class for the student seats. The two nominees from each group receiving the most votes will be presented to the full Board for approval. If any or all fail to be approved the nominee(s) with the next highest vote





totals will be presented. The parent/guardian seats and the student seats **must** be filled from the available list of nominees.

**C. Describe the roles and responsibilities of the board.**

The trustees will be expected to be actively involved in fund-raising, student and staff recruitment, establishing direction for the North Star Academy and providing oversight of the operations of the school. The trustees will assume many of the same responsibilities as a School Committee would. This would include, but may not be limited to:

- \* - Periodic reassessment of criteria for student advancement in consultation with the educational staff.
- \* - Setting the annual academic calendar for the North Star Academy
- \* - Approving any changes to the school charter, Articles of Organization or management agreement.
- \* - Approval and authorization of the North Star Academy's annual budget and audit.
- \* - Approval of candidates submitted by the managing entity for the position of Administrative Director.
- \* - Dismissal of the Administrative Director for just cause.
- \* - Receipt of funds from all sources for the operation of the North Star Academy.
- \* - Participating in appeal hearings for students who have chosen to appeal a suspension or expulsion.

**D. Describe the relationship of the board to teachers and administration?**

The trustees are expected to develop a close relationship to all staff members. All staff members will be welcome to attend all open Board meetings and will be invited to attend relevant committee meetings. Trustees will be invited to all staff meetings and will be free to sit-in on classes at their discretion.

**E. Discuss the nature of parental and student involvement in decision-making matters.**

The students of the North Star Academy Charter School will have a student government based on the town meeting concept. Issues and





problems of concern to the general student body will be discussed and debated at monthly assembly meetings on the last Friday of each month. An elected panel of 5 facilitators will be responsible for acting on the outcomes of those assemblies, recruiting students to serve on ad hoc committees, and developing the initial agenda for each meeting. The Administrative Director and the Lead Instructor will be responsible for working with this group of students to ensure that the student government runs smoothly. The student trustees, who will not be eligible to serve as facilitators, will work closely with the elected facilitators and will carry student concerns directly to the Board of Trustees. Athletic and extra-curricular programs will be started only after requested by students. Students will be expected to present a detailed proposal for such request including plans for financial support. (A small amount of funds will be made available by setting aside funds in each of the direct student costs budget items except insurance. However, students will be expected to explore outside funding possibilities.)

Parent input in decision-making for the North Star Academy will be ensured by the parent trustees and the annual parent/guardian satisfaction survey. Parents will be invited to start a support group/ PTO meeting for additional involvement.



## **SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

### **A. What type of community environment do you hope to foster at your school?**

The North Star Academy will seek to foster a co-operative community environment. The example of this will be set by the staff in their co-operative operation of the school. Students will be encouraged to be supportive of each other and to view the school facility as their home away from home. The Learning Tree Academy has accomplished these goals by having students provide tutoring to each other and assuming partial responsibility for the maintenance of that facility. Similar efforts will likely be tested at the North Star Academy.

### **B. Describe the nature and extent of parent involvement in the life of the school.**

Because most of the parents of the targeted students population are likely to have other day time commitments, their involvement during the school day is expected to be limited. However, they will play a major role in efforts to have the school facility and resources (library, computer lab and telecommunications equipment) available for extended hours after the conclusion of the school day. Some parents will be recruited to become chaperones for students during their Friday activities. Once the school moves into its permanent facility, community groups will also be encouraged to utilize the space for a minimal fee. At that point students may be allowed to have supervised gatherings at the school for free.

### **C. Describe the relationship of your school to the surrounding community, and vice versa.**

The school will develop a working relationship with all established youth organizations in the surrounding community. As stated above, community groups will be given opportunities to utilize the space once a permanent facility is secured.





## REPLICABILITY AND DISTRICT RELATIONS

### A. How will your charter school offer replicable educational models to the schools in the surrounding districts?

By their very nature, charter schools are replicable. They are widely publicized state endorsements of the need for public education to "go private" for a while to develop models which work better than those in current use, then to bring them "home" for more widespread use.

"Bringing them home" is what these efforts should be all about. It is important to work effectively with a small number but the true value of discovering and perfecting what works and what does not is how to make that discovery systemic - and ultimately throw a charter school out of business. That should be the goal of charter schools that are designed for mainstream student, i.e., schools that are not specialty schools, such as art or music schools. That is the goal of the North Star Academy, to make systemic change both within and outside the Springfield school district.

How will we offer these models? One way is to publicize the model, to bring attention to the model so that it will be in demand. The public is looking for something that works. But how will they learn about it?

The North Star Academy will utilize its expertise and experiences with The Learning Tree Academy which has resulted in significant public education and awareness of how a new model works. North Star's management team has already been successful in spreading the Tree model through feature stories in The Boston Globe, Daily Hampshire Gazette, Springfield Union-News, and Business West. The Tree has been featured in a four minute story on National Public Radio's Morning Edition as well as on feature educational programs and documentaries on Channel 40 and Public Television Channel 57. The Tree model has appeared in two publications, "Healing Racism" by Nathan Rutstein and "Compassion In Action" by Ram Dass and Mirabi Bush, published by Random House. This publicity has been part of our campaign to replicate the Tree model and we will bring this same commitment of public awareness to the North Star Academy.

The North Star Academy will be pro-active in demonstrating to and dialoguing with surrounding school districts and schools of education a model which is working. We will be especially interested in working with the Holyoke School Department as the drop-out rate in Holyoke's inner-city communities rivals that of Springfield. Our methods of replication will include:





- a. Attract the print and visual media to publicize our work through features and specialized news stories.
- b. Invite "from the ground up" representatives of other school districts to witness our work by visiting our school. This will include teachers and administrators from other schools districts as well as superintendents.
- c. Pubish teaching manuals which detail our teaching pedagogies and teaching materials.
- d. Conduct and publish studies which compare the learning and graduation rates between our students and others within our school district, and offer this infomration to other school districts struggling with similar problems.
- e. Urge the Springfield School Department to adopt pertinent parts of our model as well as considering the adoption of our entire model.
- f. Urge surrounding school districts to adopt our model and assist them with the implementation process.
- g. Seek grants to have the resources to develop and implement a successful replication campaign, otherwise the best intentions may wind up on the back burner.

**B. If applicable, provide any specific programs to be provided by the charter school which would directly benefit the district.**

The district will benefit from our charter school's curriculum and pedagogies which will offer comfort to teachers who for years have been saying that smaller classes are needed to properly teach inner-city students. Ultimately, the district will benefit from a curriculum which is historically truth-based and challenges institutional racism.

**C. What efforts, if any, have you made to build rapport with the district from which your charter school would draw students?**

These efforts are many and have been detailed in other sections of this application. In summary, many of us as the management team as well as Board of Trustees have a close working relationship with the Superintendent of Schools Dr. Peter Negroni. Many of us also have a close working relationship with some members of the Springfield School Committee. All of us have close working relationships with many teachers, administrators and senior school officials. The partnerships we have already formed



'with the Springfield School Department, such as the Community Teachers Partnership Program, detailed elsewhere in this application, are testimony to our ability and desire to work closely with the school district. A letter from our superintendent of schools Dr. Peter Negroni endorsing the work of our original collaborative organization is also enclosed.





## BUILDING OPTIONS

### A. Describe your present options for a school building.

Currently we are exploring the possibility of receiving a donated space for the first year of operations. Three colleges, American International College, Springfield Technical Community College (STCC) and Springfield College, which are located in the heart of the target area for the school have been approached for that purpose. Meetings between representatives of the three colleges has focused on using available funds for community rehabilitation to secure a site which would be made available not only to the North Star Academy, but other community groups and agencies. While this would be an acceptable first year location, the founding coalition feels that the school should move into its own site as quickly as possible. The existing affiliations that the Western Mass. Learning Tree has with Springfield College also makes it very likely that space on-campus or off-campus will be donated.

In seeking a suitable permanent facility the search has centered on the Old Hill and Six Corners neighborhoods in Springfield. The most promising option to date is a structure which is located in the Six Corners neighborhood at 218-220 Pine St. This structure is a vacant apartment building and has 13,276 sq.ft. of usable space which would provide a per student area of 88.5 sq.ft. when the school reaches full capacity. There are no outstanding mortgages or liens on the property. However, there is an outstanding tax debt of approximately \$13,600.00 not including late penalties and legal fees. Jeff Sullivan, vice-president Bank of Western Mass., has started investigating the possibility of having the tax debt waived if the property is purchased for the North Star Charter School. We will be working with a local property appraiser to secure contractor estimates on the costs to renovate the structure which would include bringing it up to code and making it handicapped accessible.





## CODE OF CONDUCT

### **A. Discuss any rules or guidelines governing student behavior.**

General principles of expected student behavior will be as follows:

1. All students are expected to conduct themselves in a non-violent manner. Physical encounters between students will be dealt with constructively, but will be considered a serious breach of this principle.
2. Each student will make an effort to be considerate of the views, values and beliefs of other students.
3. All students are expected to assist the staff in creating a cooperative learning environment and will not engage in activities which damage or threaten that environment.
4. Each student is expected to actively participate in her/his own learning experience.
5. All students are expected to be aware of and contribute in a positive manner to the North Star Academy's role and impact in the immediate and general community and will not engage in activities which may damage the relationship between the academy and the community

The exact rules relating to student behavior will be developed in conjunction with the full educational staff and first year students and submitted to the Secretary of Education prior to the completion of the first semester of classes. All student behavior rules and discipline policies will be included in the student handbook.

### **B. Describe your school's policies regarding student expulsion and suspension.**

Every effort will be made to avoid the use of suspensions as a regular disciplinary tool. Both suspension and expulsions carry serious implications and should be reserved for only the most serious offenses where others are physically endangered or the learning environment is seriously threatened. All other disciplinary problems will be dealt with in the context of the school's student engagement philosophy.

There will be two levels of suspension for the students of the North Star Academy; short-term suspensions and long term suspension. Short-term suspensions (8 class-days or less) and long-term suspensions (more than 8 class-days) may be implemented



by either the Administrative Director or the Lead Instructor for repeated and/or serious breeches of the rules relating to student behavior. Suspensions imposed under the provisions of Mass. General Laws, Chapter 71 or Chapter 380 of the Acts of 1993 may be implemented only by the Administrative Director. All expulsions must be implemented by the Administrative Director.

As required by state law the following provisions relating to suspensions, expulsion and due process will be included in the student handbook:

In accordance with Mass. General Laws Chapter 71, Sections 37H & 37L and Chapter 380 of the Acts of 1993:

Any student who is found on the premises of the North Star Academy or at academy-sponsored or academy-related events in possession of a dangerous weapon or a controlled substance, including, but not limited to, marijuana, cocaine, crack, and heroin, will be subject to expulsion from the academy by the Administrative Director.

Any student who physically assaults the Administrative Director, a member of the educational staff, other staff member or an academy volunteer on the premises of the North Star Academy or at academy-sponsored or academy-related events will be subject to expulsion from the academy by the Administrative Director.

Any student who is charged with a violation of either of the above paragraphs will be notified in writing of an opportunity for a formal hearing before the Admin. Dir. and the President of the Board of Trustees [or her/his designee(s)]. At said hearing, the student and/or the parents/guardians of said student may have legal and/or other representation, along with the opportunity to present evidence and witnesses.

After the hearing, but before a decision by the President of the Trustees [or her/his designee(s)], the Admin. Dir. may, at his/her discretion decide to suspend rather than expel the student in question. However, the Admin. Dir. must state in writing to the President of the Board or any other Trustee(s) who were present at the hearing the reasons for choosing suspension rather than expulsion. In this statement, the Admin. Dir. will indicate how the safety, security and welfare of the other students and staff will be ensured

Any student who has been expelled from the North Star Academy Charter School pursuant to these provisions shall have the right to appeal to the full Board of Trustees. The expelled student or his/her parents will have ten days from the date of the first hearing to notify the Admin. Dir. of this new appeal. The student will have the right to counsel before the full Board. The subject matter of this appeal shall not be limited solely to a factual determination of whether the student has violated any of the relevant provisions in this policy.

When a student is expelled under the provisions of this policy, it will be made clear that no school or school district within the commonwealth shall







'be required to admit such student or to provide educational services to said student. If the student does apply for admission to another school or school district the Admin. Dir. of the North Star Academy will, upon request, forward to the superintendent of the new school or school district a written statement indicating the reasons for the student's expulsion from the North Star Academy.

Upon the issuance of a criminal complaint charging a student with a felony or upon the issuance of a felony delinquency complaint against a student, the Administrative Director may suspend such student for a period of time he/she deems to be appropriate if he/she determines that the student's continued presence at the North Star Academy would have a substantial detrimental effect on the general welfare of the North Star Academy. The student shall receive written notification of her/his right to appeal and the process for appealing the suspension. (The same appeal process spelled out above for expulsions will apply to this type of suspension.) The suspension shall remain in effect while the appeal process is operating.

Upon a student being convicted of a felony or upon adjudication or admission of guilt in court with respect to a felony or felony delinquency, the Administrative Director of the North Star Academy may expell said student if his/her continued presence would have a substantial detrimental effect on the general welfare of the North Star Academy. The student shall receive written notification of the charges and reasons for the expulsion prior to the effective date of the expulsion. detrimental effect on the general welfare of the North Star Academy. The student shall receive written notification of her/his right to appeal and the process for appealing the expulsion. (The same appeal process spelled out above for expulsions will apply to this type of expulsion.)



## **SPECIAL NEEDS & BILINGUAL STUDENTS**

### **A. Describe how your school will accomodate special needs students.**

When an applicant who is identified as a special needs student applies for admission to the North Star Academy the admissions team will request a copy of the student's IEP and will give due consideration to the individual needs and abilities of that student. If the admissions team inconjunction with the student's current evaluation team determine that the North Star's academic program can be adjusted to meet the educational needs of that student then she/he will be considered an eligible applicant and will be placed into the pool with all other applicants to be admitted or placed into the appropriate lottery.

Once enrolled any special needs student who is not participating in a community based advocacy program will be referred to one. The educational staff will assign an instructor to become part of his/her evaluation team and will work with the community-based advocacy program and the Springfield public schools to develop additional one-on-one tutoring and other services beyond what the academy will have available. Laws relating to the responsibilities which remain with the sending district(s) will be observed closely. These students will participate in the regular classrooms and will be allowed to bring in tutors and respite workers to assist them.

### **Describe how your school will accomodate bilingual students.**

The organizers of the North Star Academy are totally committed to fully accomodating the needs of bilingual students. Based on the demographics of the target population, we anticipate that the need for bilingual services will be primarily for Spanish-speaking students. The organizers of the North Star Academy have initiated discussions with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) around providing services for any Spanish-speaking students who are in need of transitional bilingual education services, and we are also exploring alternative providers. One instructor slot has been budgeted for this purpose. The PRCC has been providing bilingual GED services to members of Springfield's Spanish-speaking community for more than a decade. We have every confidence that if an areement is reached the staff of the PRCC in conjunction with the instructor provided by the North Star Academy can adapt the curriculums for levels I & II to be delivered to bilingual students. (Note: Bilingual students must complete their transitional program before entering Level III.) By contracting with the PRCC to provide bilingual services the North Star Academy will have the benefit of an established bilingual educational program with deep roots in the Hispanic community.





Specific slots have been designated for bilingual studnets. During the first year there will be 5 Level I slots. During the second year there will be 10 Level I slots and 5 Level II slots. Thereafter, there will be 15 slots to be allocated based on need at each level. Any additional placements above these numbers (i.e., more than 15 bilingual students) will reduce the number of general slots available for incoming studnets that year. The teacher to student ratio for this program will not be allowed to exceed 1:20.



## FUNDING

**A. Devise a start-up budget covering the planning and capital expenses before school opening.**

The start-up budget is included in the Appendix.

**B. Do you plan to conduct any fund-raising efforts to generate capital or to supplement the per pupil allocation.**

The Western Mass. Learning Tree will be approaching both regional and national foundations for additional financial support. This agency has a very successful track record of being able to attract funding from private foundations. The Learning Tree is currently in its fifth year of operations as a non-profit corporation and **has relied solely on private funding** to support its operational budget which now exceeds \$300,000 per year. The Davis Foundation has already indicated an interest in providing some start-up funding. There will also probably be a limited effort to secure individual donations.

**C. Devise a 5-year budget.**

The 5-year budget projection is included in the Appendix.





## TRANSPORTATION

Arrangements will be made for Springfield students to utilize the Springfield public schools' busing system to travel to school. Springfield students who live further than one mile from the school facility will be provided city bus passes to return home at the end of the school day, since the school day for the North Star Academy will run longer than the school day for the Springfield School System and the public school bus service will be over.

Out of district students will receive assistance in making transportation arrangements with their home district. In most instances the home districts will probably required them to provide their own transportation and receive reimbursement. If a significant number of students (five or more) are commuting from one out of district community, the staff of the North Star Academy will attempt to set-up a collective transportation arrangement (i.e. carpools, obtaining services from a private busing company).

Students who live less than one mile from the academy will be expected to walk to the academy and back home at the end of the day. We are exploring the cost of a contract to provide transportation for field trips and other school outings.



**THE NORTH STAR ACADEMY  
CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION**

**APPENDIX.**





## NORTH STAR ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL START-UP BUDGET

REVENUE	Monthly Amount	Months	No	Total
Per Pupil Revenue	\$ 0	5		\$0
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>				<b>\$0</b>

## EXPENSES

## SALARIES AND BENEFITS

Admin Dir	\$3,750.00	5	1	\$18,750.00
Lead Instr.	3,334.00	4	1	13,336.00
Instructor	2,917.00	1	3.25	9,481.00
Adm. Asst.	1,750.00	3	.67	3,518.00
Subtotal:				<u>\$45,085.00</u>

## Services and Activities

Custodial	1,500.00	1	.67	\$ 1,005.00
Cook	1,500.00	1	.67	1,005.00
Cooking supplies				500.00
Food				<u>2,500.00</u>
Subtotal:				<u>\$ 5,010.00</u>

## Supplies and Equipment

Telephone	250.00	3	N/A	in-kind
Telephone	250.00	2	N/A	500.00
Furniture & Appliances	5,000.00	N/A	N/A	in-kind
	2,000.00	N/A	N/A	2,000.00
Computers	3,500.00	N/A	N/A	in-kind
Computers	5,000.00	N/A	N/A	5,000.00
Educ Materials	3,500.00	N/A	N/A	in-kind
Educ Materials	1,500.00	N/A	N/A	1,500.00
Copy Machine	300.00	3	N/A	900.00
Printing	350.00	5	N/A	<u>1,750.00</u>
Subtotal:				<u>\$11,650.00</u>

## Marketing/Advert

Printing	1,250.00	N/A	N/A	1,250.00
Advertising	1,500.00	N/A	N/A	<u>1,500.00</u>
Subtotal:				<u>\$ 2,750.00</u>

## Physical Plant

Renovations	8,000.00	N/A	N/A	8,000.00
Rent	0	5	N/A	0
Utilities	0	5	N/A	<u>0</u>
Subtotal:				<u>8,000.00</u>

**Total Expenses** **\$72,495.00**

EXCESS (DEFICIT) = "Total Revenue" - "Total Expen" **\$72,495.00**

## GRANTS AND LOANS

Corporate Grants	<u>\$15,000.00</u>
Private Grants	60,000.00
Individual Donor Grants	3,000.00
<b>Total Grants</b>	<b>\$78,000.00</b>

Ending Fund Balance **\$ 5,505.00**





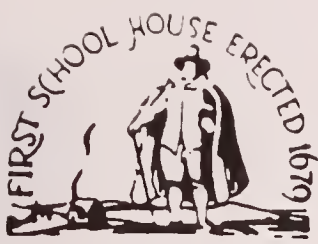
# Charter School Operating Budget

## Five Year Projection

DESCRIPTION	FY 1995	FY 1996	FY 1997	FY 1998	FY 1999
<b>REVENUES</b>					
Per Pupil Tuition Revenue	275,000	577,500	825,000	825,000	825,000
Student Entitlements	30,000	63,000	90,000	90,000	90,000
Grants	70,000	35,000	25,000	25,000	30,000
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>375,000</b>	<b>675,500</b>	<b>940,000</b>	<b>940,000</b>	<b>945,000</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>					
<i>Direct Student Costs:</i>					
Transportation	9,000	18,000	27,000	27,000	27,000
Supplies	9,000	13,500	20,250	20,250	20,000
Computers and Materials	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	1,500
Field Study	3,000	5,000	7,500	7,500	7,500
Insurance Expense	18,000	22,000	25,000	26,000	27,000
<b>Total Direct Student Costs</b>	<b>45,000</b>	<b>64,500</b>	<b>85,750</b>	<b>86,750</b>	<b>83,000</b>
<i>Personnel:</i>					
Principal/Executive	45,000	46,350	47,741	49,174	50,650
Teachers	168,000	324,040	484,762	499,305	514,285
Clerical	15,000	30,450	31,364	32,305	33,275
Custodians / Food Service	12,000	36,720	49,822	51,317	52,857
Benefits	INCLUDED IN SALARIES FOR ELIGIBLE STAFF				
Staff Development	3,500	6,000	8,250	8,250	8,000
<b>Total Personnel</b>	<b>243,500</b>	<b>443,560</b>	<b>621,939</b>	<b>640,351</b>	<b>659,067</b>
<i>Occupancy:</i>					
Rent	In-Kind	N/a	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mortgage	18,000	18,000	18,000	18,000	18,000
Maintenance	In-Kind	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Utilities	2,000	3,500	3,500	4,000	4,000
Janitorial Supplies	700	800	900	900	1,000
<b>Total Occupancy</b>	<b>20,700</b>	<b>24,300</b>	<b>24,400</b>	<b>24,900</b>	<b>25,000</b>
<i>Office:</i>					
Supplies	2,400	2,900	3,400	3,400	3,000
Equipment Rental/Maintenance	4,500	4,500	4,500	5,000	5,000
Telephone/Communications	3,000	4,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Accounting & Payroll	9,500	9,500	9,500	11,000	11,000
Printing & Copying	4,000	4,500	5,000	5,000	5,000
Postage & Shipping	1,200	1,500	1,800	1,800	1,800
<b>Total Office</b>	<b>24,600</b>	<b>26,900</b>	<b>29,200</b>	<b>31,200</b>	<b>30,800</b>
<i>Other:</i> Student Meals	40,400	84,840	121,200	121,200	121,200
Capital Expenditures	5,500	2,500	2,500	3,000	2,000
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>379,700</b>	<b>646,600</b>	<b>884,989</b>	<b>907,401</b>	<b>921,067</b>
<b>EXCESS (or DEFICIENCY)</b>	<b>(4,700)</b>	<b>28,900</b>	<b>55,011</b>	<b>32,599</b>	<b>23,933</b>
<b>BEGINNING FUND BALANCE</b>	<b>5,505</b>	<b>805</b>	<b>29,705</b>	<b>84,716</b>	<b>117,315</b>
<b>ENDING FUND BALANCE</b>	<b>805</b>	<b>29,705</b>	<b>84,716</b>	<b>117,315</b>	<b>141,248</b>







THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS of SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

Dr. Peter J. Negroni  
Superintendent

Central Office  
P.O. Box 1410  
195 State Street  
Springfield, MA  
01102-1410

April 29, 1994

PEW  
Rockefeller  
Ford  
Kellogg  
National Foundations

Re: Foundation Support - The Learning Tree

Dear Foundations:

The Learning Tree is a private, not-for-profit alternative school in Springfield, Massachusetts which has established an exemplary record of collaboration and service. Partnerships with Springfield College, Hampshire College and the Springfield Public Schools have enabled Mr. Serota and his staff to produce some remarkable results with students.

The Learning Tree addresses a tremendous need in Springfield related to out-of-school urban youth who have experienced academic failure. With a nearly 40% dropout rate, the Springfield Public Schools appreciate and support the efforts of The Learning Tree and wish to see the school expand and flourish. With Learning Tree graduates enrolled in a variety of two and four year institutions of higher education, it is very clear that its mission, philosophy and staff have developed a pedagogical model worth emulating.

My enthusiasm and support for the Learning Tree leads me to invite your questions and inquiries in a most direct fashion. Therefore, please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone, fax or mail regarding the important educational work being done at The Learning Tree.

Sincerely,

Dr. Peter J. Negroni  
Superintendent of Schools  
(413)787-7087 Fax 787-7171

/tf





COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE  
STATE HOUSE BOSTON 02133-1053

SENATOR LINDA J. MELCONIAN

HAMPDEN DISTRICT  
ROOM 213B, STATE HOUSE  
TEL (617) 722-1660

DISTRICT OFFICE  
375 WALNUT STREET EXT  
AGAWAM, MA 01001  
TEL. (413) 786-6033

SENATE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
(CHAIRWOMAN)

SENATE WAYS AND MEANS

COMMITTEES

INSURANCE

JUDICIARY (VICE CHAIRWOMAN)

POST AUDIT AND OVERSIGHT

STATE ADMINISTRATION

RULES

**September 16, 1994**

Mr. Arthur Serota  
The Learning Tree  
46 Colchester Street  
Springfield, MA 01101

Dear Mr. Serota:

*Art,*

I regret that I was unable to attend your open house on Wednesday, September 14, 1994. I did not receive your kind invitation until the actual day of your event and saw it after it was over.

I congratulate and commend you on your continuing hard work and total commitment to the community through this educational center. The fine work that you do to help young people achieve goals and succeed where others have malignly caused them to fail demonstrates real courage, confidence and compassion.

As I have often said to you, we need 100 Art Serota's in Springfield, doing what you do daily at The Learning Tree. Please feel free to contact me to schedule another time to visit The Learning Tree. Again, congratulations and best wishes.

Sincerely,

LINDA J. MELCONIAN  
State Senator





October 6, 1994

263 Alden Street  
Springfield, MA 01109-3700  
(413) 745-3000

Ms. Kathy McHue  
Grants Administration  
Jesse Cox Charitable Trust  
Grants Management Association  
230 Congress Street  
Boston, MA.

Dear Ms. McHue:

This letter is in support of a grant renewal for The Learning Tree (Springfield, MA), a member of the Community Teachers Partnership Program, of which my college is also a member.

During the past year I have worked very closely with The Learning Tree as a representative of Springfield College's Education Department. With the support of the Jesse Cox Charitable Trust, The Learning Tree and the Education Department were able to recruit and enroll three local students of color in our college's education program. Lance Green, Calvin Hamrick, and Kevin Ward began their academic work this September and, from our early evaluation and close monitoring of their work, are doing quite well.

This has been a very satisfying success for the initial effort of our Partnership Program. Our goal is to recruit and train local minority students in the education field so they can become teachers in our public schools. Dr. Peter Negroni, our Superintendent of Education, has made a verbal agreement to help place our students upon graduation. We are looking forward to formalizing this agreement with the Springfield Board of Education.

Based on the positive results of our efforts, The Learning Tree and Springfield College are aiming to recruit five new students for next year's class. Dr. Randolph Bromery, Springfield College President, is strongly behind this program. The Partnership Program has already moved in a very positive direction and is building in the way we had anticipated. I hope that the Jesse Cox Charitable Trust will see fit to continue its invaluable support. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Robert R. Klein, Ed. D.  
Asst. Prof. of Education

rk:js  
fall '94



# Hampshire College

Amherst, Massachusetts 01002

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

(413) 549-4600

May 6, 1994

Mr. Arthur D. Serota  
Executive Director  
The Learning Tree  
46 Colchester Street  
Springfield, MA 01109

Dear Art:

It is with pleasure that I write in support of The Learning Tree. I am proud that Hampshire College has formed a strong working relationship with the Tree, and that it is that relationship that helped develop and sustain Hampshire's The James Baldwin Scholars Program. As you well know, we look to the Learning Tree not only for advice about the Baldwin Scholars Program, but also and most importantly for applicants to the program. The Baldwin Scholars Program is a model, I think, of the kind of imaginative programming that can grow out of partnerships between higher education and community organizations. I look forward to other opportunities in which Hampshire College and The Learning Tree can work together.

Sincerely,



Gregory S. Prince, Jr.

GSP/jh  
94-631







**BANK OF WESTERN  
MASSACHUSETTS**

November 18, 1994

Mr. Frank Thompson  
c/o The Learning Tree  
46 Colchester St.  
Springfield, MA 01109

Dear Frank:

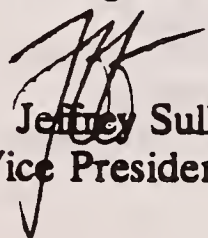
I enjoyed meeting with you and Art last week, and thanks to your students at the academy who let me sit in on their class. The program at The Learning Tree appears to be first class; I am sure you will be able to enjoy similar successes in the new charter school.

I believe that there are many ways in which The Bank of Western Massachusetts and your new and existing academies can work together as partners. A few ideas are summarized below:

- \* We can explore loan programs for both short term cash flow needs stemming from either accounts receivable from the City or from gaps in a fund drive or grant award. We could also look at financing fixed asset purchases if you end up needing some long term debt along with the grants and donations. I am speaking with the SBA as well as other quasi-public financing agencies to see if you might qualify for below market rate loan programs.
- \* We may be willing to make a donation to the new school, and to promote our partnership with the school with our customer base.
- \* We could work with local restaurants and food service companies to work out a day of the month when lunch would be donated to the school.
- \* Our employees could donate books, school supplies, clothes, computers, etc. as your needs arise for students heading off to college or to prep school.

I look forward to working together with you and Art as the plans progress for the new school and as The Learning Tree continues to grow and succeed in the City.

Best regards,



J. Jeffrey Sullivan  
Vice President





# **The Learning Tree Staff**

## **Arthur Serota, Executive Director**

Qualifications: B.S., University of Maine; Juris Doctor, Suffolk Law School.

Civil rights attorney since 1970; community activist in Springfield, Mass. for over 20 years. Former teacher, Univ. of Mass. - Continuing Studies; teacher and community developer in Zimbabwe, Africa for three years. Public Affairs Director, WTCC-FM, Springfield; Director, Community Ministry, Council of Churches of Greater Springfield. Founder and Director, The Learning Tree. Former Chief Counsel, Springfield branch, NAACP. Winner of "Eyes on the Prize" Award, 1992; "Community Service Award", Mass. Bar Association, 1991.

Duties: Administration, fund-raising, financial management, teaching, mentoring, counseling, development, public relations.

## **Frank Thompson, Deputy Director, Teacher**

Qualifications: B.A., Amherst College; MPH, University of Massachusetts

Program Director (1990-93), Dunbar Community Center, Springfield; former teacher, Learning Tree

Duties: Teaches social-cultural studies, advanced math, earth sciences. Co-teaches Interpretations of Literature. Assists in administration of Tree, the Academy, development of Community Teachers Partnership Project, replication efforts.

## **Eric Lerner, Director of Education, Writing Teacher**

Qualifications: B.A., Harvard University

Long-time script writer, author and publicist. Hollywood script writer who wrote "Bird on a Wire", starring Goldie Hawn and Mel Gibson. Former editor and publisher, "Zero Magazine", which published contemporary and Pulitzer Prize winning writers.

Duties: Teaches analytical, expository and creative writing to GED and college preparatory students at The Learning Tree; develops reading and writing curricula; coordinates James Baldwin Scholar writing workshops; mentor.

## **John S. Goldsby, Teacher, Academy and GED Courses, Student Advisor**

Qualifications: BA, Southeast Missouri State University; Teaching Certificate, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Immunology Lab Manager, University of Mass.; Supervisor, Missouri Public Interest Research Group; volunteer with teen writing workshop of Amherst Writers and Artists, Inc., and big brother with Amherst Regional High.

Duties: Teaches GED and Academy courses; trains on computers; advises students

## **Mirabal Bush, Consultant for Development**

Qualifications: B. A., Duquesne University; ABD in Literature, State University of New York at Buffalo

Assistant Director, Experimental Program in Independent Study, a bridge program for black and Latino students, SUNY Buffalo, 1968-69. Founder and director, Illuminations, Inc, Cambridge, MA, national gift company with special human resources programs for minority groups, including Cambodian refugees. Author, *Compassion in Action* (Random House). Project evaluator, Cummings Foundation, New World Foundation. Currently Director, Project Action Group for Guatemala, Seva Foundation. Director, Publications, Seva. Former Treasurer and Chairperson, Seva.

Duties: Fund-raising, consulting on organizational development.

## **Ned Barry, Business Teacher**

Qualifications: B.A., Amherst College; Juris Doctor, Harvard Law School. Senior partner, Robinson, Donovan, Madden & Barry, 30 years, in Springfield's largest business law firm.

Duties: Teaches practical business studies: contracts, credit, banking and finance, stock market, real estate, etc.





STUDENT EVALUATION BY TEACHER

Weekly Form

Name of Student \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Date of this evaluation \_\_\_\_\_

Period of Evaluation/The Week of \_\_\_\_\_

In subjective terms, rate the following criteria:

a) Attendance and lateness record: \_\_\_\_\_

b) Lateness record: \_\_\_\_\_

c) Attention to and completion of in-class and supervised study assignments:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

d) Attention to and completion of homework assignments:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

e) Overall effort: \_\_\_\_\_

f) Noticeable overall improvement in:

1. Effort: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. Skills: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Classroom participation: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Comprehension of work: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. In-class assignments: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. Homework: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

g) Behavior or other issues which need to be addressed?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

h) Overall summary: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



MID-SEMESTER EVALUATION BY TEACHER

Name of Student \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Mid-Semester Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Objective Criteria:

a. Attendance record: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Lateness record: \_\_\_\_\_

c. Homework assignment submissions: \_\_\_\_\_

d. Tests and quizzes: \_\_\_\_\_

Subjective Criteria:

Evaluate the student as to:

a. Attention to and completion of in-class and supervised study assignments: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Attention to and completion of homework assignments: \_\_\_\_\_

c. Overall effort: \_\_\_\_\_

d. Evaluation of skills which advanced, and to what degree: \_\_\_\_\_

e. Evaluation of skills which have not advanced, or need more attention: \_\_\_\_\_

f. Evaluation of academic advancement: \_\_\_\_\_





g. Evaluation of writing:

Development of a thesis: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Development of an argument: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Development of openings and closings: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Organization of writing: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Research abilities and the ability to extract information and  
use in written assignments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

h. Summary of Improvement:

1. Effort: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. Skills: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. Classroom participation: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. Comprehension of work: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
5. In-class assignments: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. Homework: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. Attitude: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
8. Maturity: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

i. Behavior or other issues which need to be addressed:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Student feedback and agreements after sharing this evaluation:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_





# The Boston Globe

SILVER BALS

Monday: Partly cloudy, 4  
Tuesday: Wind and windy,  
High tide: 4:06 a.m., 4:23 p  
Full report: Page 70



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / PHIL BRIDGES

—An independent Arthur Serota with some of his students.

## Planting a Learning Tree

By Nathan Cobb  
GLOBE STAFF

**SPRINGFIELD** — It was 1962. Seven-year-old Arthur Serota was temporarily attending an all-day elementary school in Miami while his mother working a divorce from his father, who was living in Brooklyn. One fine morning, Mrs. Lew Serota's teacher, was explaining why she believed the best choice in the upcoming election. She told us that if Stevenson was elected, we not graduates would have to hold hands with him. Serota recalls, "I went home and repeated it to my mother. And for the first and only time in life, she cracked me across the face."

Was that it? Was it that fierce, maternal slap, but more than four decades ago and lasting an imprint that cast Art Serota in such burning, almost creative, opposition to racism? I wrote at him now. Nearly six years ago, Serota took a high profile law practice in order to found

\$234,688, culled from foundations, donors and fund-raising events.

"What Art has," says Joe Morales in a newspaper voice, smiling from under a Chicago Bulls cap, "is a very big heart."

Morales, 18, lives with his mother. But he has also lived in 12 foster homes. Two years ago, he quit public school. Now, at The Tree, he is working toward his GED and talking about college. Maybe Springfield. Or maybe Howard, down in Washington.

Had he ever thought about college when he was younger? "I didn't like school, so why would I ever have thought about college?" he answers, chuckling. "I didn't want to learn or listen. The teachers didn't want to listen to me, either. They didn't want to hear my ideas. They didn't care what I thought. They just wanted to know if my answers were right or wrong."

For the soft-spoken but persuasive Serota, who lives in a city in which blacks and Hispanics represent 35 percent of the population and 64 percent of the public school enrollment, involvement in such lives seems only proper, just, and natural. After all he's been chief counsel to the local branch of the NAACP, a community development worker in Africa, and a briefing voice against apartheid. While a lawyer, he challenged Hampton County's all-white jury selection system and filed several complaints of police brutality on behalf of clients. And he was a respected and relentless defender who represented thousands of local blacks and Hispanics whose criminal actions, he unshakably believes, were rooted in poverty and race.

But it wasn't enough. "In 1985 and 1986, I began to realize there was no way I was going to stay in law practice for the rest of my life," he explains as he sits in his small, cluttered office surrounded by computer hardware that sometimes half-

showed up as a defendant if the environment in which that person had grown up had been different.

"So I decided I was going to step out of law practice and intervene in the lives of people early enough and supportively enough with enough structure. I wanted to take a person from the point of having dropped out of school — or having graduated from high school without being ready for college — to a point of being ready for higher education."

Hampton County District Attorney William Bennett has known Serota nearly 20 years. "What Arthur always understood is that the legal system deals with the end result," says Bennett. "He was representing people who'd already done something wrong. He always wanted, in some way, to get to the root cause, to try to stop kids from coming into the courts in the first place."

Becoming a one-man schoolhouse was not what Serota originally had in mind. Raised primarily in Brooklyn, he nevertheless became an anti-race science major at the University of Maine, where he enrolled in advanced Army ROTC. But in the war in Vietnam heated up, so did Serota's opposition to it. He postponed his Army commission by attending Boston's Suffolk University Law School. By 1970, however, he was a reluctant officer in the Medical Services Corps, where he noticed something: "Almost every officer was white, but the enlisted men were black, Hispanics and poor whites. And it wasn't hard to see who was getting injured the most in Vietnam, who was in the front lines. I started to see the relationship of class and race to war."

Serota became an expert on the subject of discharge, soon leaving the military honorably and with all berets. He landed in Springfield with \$200 and opened a two-room law office. He was soon handling criminal cases, and over the next 17



Arthur Serota with students in front of his Springfield school, The Learning Tree.

## Helping minority youth

where other lawyers would charge \$100,000, but he'd charge \$500."

By 1980, Serota was suffering burnout. He traveled to Africa where he trekked into the lush, mountainous Tangwena region of newly independent Zimbabwe to direct construction of a 17-building high school. ("Although on this day I have trouble driving a nail straight.") He eventually returned to the country six times. He didn't learn how to drive a nail, but he did learn the value of people becoming involved in their own lives, getting in touch with their own culture, developing self-esteem and pride, and gaining access to skills and resources.

For 20-year-old Thomas Johnson, resources are indeed an issue. Johnson graduated from Springfield's High School of Commerce in 1992. He says he was a mediocre student, but wanted to attend college. "But the counselors at the school weren't helpful," he says. "They

due the next day. "No one ever did that before," muses Johnson, who later enrolled at Hampshire College in Amherst. It wasn't a smooth transition — Serota concedes that not all of his students have adjusted to college — and Johnson is now back at The Tree working on his writing skills. But he says he wants to return to school.

"These kids are all capable of learning," insists Serota, drum-beating a favorite theme. "But they get little family support because racism destroyed their families. Meanwhile, self-discipline is hard to install because of peer pressure. And their lifestyle, struggles and culture are not understood by most school teachers and administrators. These people can't identify with the students who sit before them. They see them as dumb; they condemn them for behavior they can't understand; they're afraid of them. And many







# A BOOST *up the*



Students gather outside The Learning Tree in the Mason Square section of Springfield. The converted home is now home to classes devoted to helping young men go to college. GORDON DANIELS

# LEARNING TREE

*Springfield program helps make college a reality*



In a classroom at The Learning Tree, Jose Morales, standing, and Earl Baker work on a computer. GORDON DANIELS



Arthur Serota, director of The Learning Tree, stresses critical thinking and community involvement in his classes. Students are, from left, Hamif Abdul-Hakim, Taki Ferguson, Thomas Mitchell and Earl Baker. GORDON DANIELS

By JUDSON BROWN  
Staff Writer

**S**OMEONE has thrown open a window on this warm sunny day so that a breeze stirs in the second-story bedroom-turned-classroom in the brick house on Springfield's Colchester Street, home of The Learning Tree, a private, alternative educational center now in its fifth year.

The breeze, carrying the sound of a skill saw and a siren, wafts around a half-dozen young men seated around a long table. The mood is relaxed, although at the head of the table Frank Thompson — the school's deputy director and teacher of four subjects, including science — is keeping the students busy as he continues a review of amino acids and the circulatory system.

In an earlier discussion about AIDS Thompson had hit upon the analogy of an army defending itself to describe the various components of the blood. This had made an impression on student James Chapman, who now talks animatedly about helpers and attackers and defenders and commanders and scouts, with Thompson then helping him to fit the right technical term with each — for instance, helper with lymphocyte.

"Oh, yeah, now I remember, let me write that down," said Chapman, 20, who graduated from Commerce High School.

At 27, Thompson is not much older than the men he's teaching, only he's on the return leg of the journey they're outward bound on — from ghetto to college.

The Learning Tree so far has sent 24 students to college, and 10 more will be joining them in the fall. Chapman will be attending Hampshire College through a special scholarship program named after writer James Baldwin that has been established there for students of "the tree," as this unique educational enterprise in the down-and-out Mason Square section of Springfield is known.

Thompson, who grew up poor in

Fort Worth, Texas, and attended Amherst College through the Upward Bound program, said he didn't hesitate to accept when Arthur Serota, founder and director of The Learning Tree, asked him to become the second full-time staff member at the school. This was his chance to help others as he had been helped.

"But for the intervention of a couple of people I could be one of these guys," Thompson said.

Serota, 49, a native of Brooklyn, holds a degree in animal science from the University of Maine and a law degree from Suffolk Law School in Boston. In 1989 he left a successful private law practice, which had become increasingly concentrated on doing pro bono criminal defense work, to establish The Learning Tree. Since then the school has been his literal home — at least where, the bachelor says, "I crash on the couch" — and his entire life.

In creating the Learning Tree, Serota likes to say he got out of the "emergency ward" — where, in representing black youths in criminal cases, he was "patching the wounds inflicted by a racist society" — and "into health care, empowering people to be survivors, to reach their potential."

The Learning Tree at first was focused on helping high school dropouts to earn their general equivalency diplomas (GEDs), to then get jobs, and in a few cases, to go on to college. Gradually the school became more selective, seeking students who had a strong ambition and aptitude for college but who needed an academic boost, considerable financial help, and often moral support to make the leap.

"This program is about having an impact on the community, and you really can't expect to have an impact with just a GED," explains Thompson in describing the shift in focus.

The enrollment at the school is around 60. The students are almost all men, mostly black, some Hispanic, and between the ages of 17 and 25 or so. Almost all are from Springfield

■ See LEARNING Page 24





# Learning Tree makes college a reality for Springfield men

■ Continued from Page 17

Some graduated from high school, some did not. Some have jobs, some don't. There is a songwriter, a radio DJ, a professional actor among them. Some of the students are fathers. Some have no family at all. Most of them heard of "the tree" through word of mouth, and referred themselves to the program, Serota said.

"We're all looking for the same thing, though we're all different," said Thomas Johnson, who has been accepted into one college for next year, is waiting to hear from two others. He'll spend this summer in England to do an internship at a community center working with homeless youths, a placement arranged through a contact of Serota's. "We're looking for a higher education."

"A way out," said Chapman. "A way out of the streets, where there's nothing but trouble."

"It's safe here," said Lance Green, a former drug addict who went to the ninth grade in public school and now is heading for Springfield College to become a teacher. Here there is freedom to discuss things and challenge one another. "That on the street would be called disrespect," he said. "We're not caught up in that lifestyle, that frame of mind where the street says, 'You step on my shoe, I'll beat you, or kill you.'"

Those who've gone on to college are counted in the enrollment because most of them continue to be supported by "the tree" in the form of help with tuition payments, rent payments, car fare, book money, or summer job placements, which is a particular focus right now. (See sidebar.)

About a sixth of The Learning Tree's \$342,000 annual budget — 50 percent of which comes from grants from major foundations, most of the rest from private donations, and virtually none from public sources — goes to help students with college-related expenses.

About a dozen students at any one time at The Learning Tree are enrolled in what is called the "academy," attending small, structured classes in science, math, social studies, literature, expository writing, business, computer literacy and sociology taught by Thompson, Serota and several volunteers.

Still another distinct group of students at The Learning Tree come specifically for "pre-college" assistance: to drill for the college board exams, to get help with college applications and financial aid forms. Recently the school closed down for three days while Serota, Thompson and four students took a swing through Pennsylvania and Virginia touring campuses.

Finally, The Learning Tree also serves 17 middle school students, ages 12 to 15, who attend an after-school academic enrichment program that is staffed by the older youths.

gram — courageous in that Serota gave up a successful career to establish it, imaginative in its "profound simplicity." Serota "lives with them, mentors them, nurtures them, and gives them the confidence and vision that they can succeed," Prince said. "Nothing works better than that personal mentoring."

There were eight students from The Learning Tree at Hampshire College this year and there will be 12 next year. Just about all of them have done well, Prince said. They've shown "a commitment to education that is very impressive as a model for our students."

Serota spends a good portion of every day in individual counseling sessions with students where they discuss not only school work but family issues and health problems. Many of the students at The Learning Tree suffer from stress-related health problems, Serota noted. Several doctors volunteer their services to the school.

One of Serota's few indulgences is gourmet cooking, and most days he serves up a big noonday meal, which everyone sits down to enjoy at tables covered with bright red tablecloths that make the small dining room look like a little Italian restaurant.

After lunch one recent day, a group of students sat out on the stoop enjoying the sun. Invited to talk about the school, the first thing they all wanted to talk about was Serota.

"I don't look at him as a teacher, I look at him as a father figure," said student Kareem Strickland. "I have no family here. He's all I've got."

"We're under the wing of Art," said Thomas "Sean" Mitchell, a singer and songwriter. "He's the first white man I have ever seen or heard of who gave up his life for black people."

As for the curriculum at The Learning Tree, it is a mix of old-fashioned drill and mastery of facts, a constant emphasis on writing, and encouragement of creativity and critical thinking — qualities that are rarely acknowledged, let alone encouraged, in the city's public schools, Serota contends.

"It's easy to turn these guys on to writing," says Eric Lerner, a novelist and scriptwriter from Northampton who teaches both expository and creative writing at the school as a volunteer.

## Afrocentric approach

Serota himself leads regular sociology seminars in which he attempts to engage the students in "Afrocentric" readings of history and highly critical analyses of what he calls the racist and

## Jobs help bridge two worlds

Norman Domine, 22, who grew up in Springfield's inner city, has just finished his second year at Hampshire College. Although he's done well academically, the rural private-school atmosphere has been like living in another world.

One of nine students from The Learning Tree in Springfield to come to Hampshire College, 22-year-old Domine felt stifled by the social atmosphere on campus, which he bitterly calls "weird" and "suspicious."

Sentenced to a summer at Hampshire, Domine said he couldn't wait to be back in Springfield for the summer. He's looking forward to going back to "the lively, bustling culture" of the city streets.

But where Domine sees the life-giving "vibe" and "network of energies" of summer in the city, Arthur Serota, director of The Learning Tree, sees danger. Domine may be confident about some money-making ventures he has in mind for the summer, but Serota is determined to find summer jobs for other Learning Tree participants. He is looking to place about a dozen of his students in jobs or internships in Hampshire County this summer. He wants the young men out of the city for the summer to avoid the violence there, he said.

Offering summer jobs to his students is one way people in Hampshire County can help "bridge the two nations," Serota said. To inquire about employment for Learning Tree students, call Serota at 733-7443.

Domine intends to devote the skills he gains in his college world to improving the world of his upbringing. He's devising a major that will concentrate the disciplines of sociology, psychology and theater. He sees his life work as a writer promoting the rebuilding of black urban communities.

— JUDSON BROWN

genocidal underpinnings of American history and culture.

"We're very very focused on teaching history in a truthful way," and in a way that encourages the thrashing out of values, a process that public schools don't take on, Serota said. "This is largely what keeps students at the Learning Tree committed to education."

Afrocentrism is more than foster in the curriculum — it is a real-world orientation symbolized by a sister school in Zimbabwe, called Muti Wedziwe Learning Tree in the Shona language, that started last summer under the aegis of The Learning Tree. Serota spent three years in Zimbabwe during the 1990s as a community development worker. One student from the Springfield Tree, Gerald Cottle, recently visited Zimbabwe with Serota, and Serota expects many others to follow.

One of Serota's recent sociology classes centered on an analysis of the widely quoted remark by city School Committee member Carmen Rose that "racism is a disease of white America," a statement that caused a furor throughout the system and led to petitions from 57 teachers calling for Rose to apologize and even quit.

Serota kept after the students to keep refining the wording of their definitions of racism and prejudice, to distinguish clearly between the two words; and then

to state their views on the controversy. He urged them to attend a public speak-out that week on the controversy — in other words to get involved.

"The teacher does not teach a subject, he teaches individuals, and there is a great deal of feedback and connection between the mind of the teacher and the mind of the student," said Serota, speaking in his tiny corner office with the yellow curtains, a room so small that a copy machine, which has to be kicked to produce copies, leaves no room to stretch a leg.

"The work that we require a person to put out, on paper — the content, the analysis, the research, the organization, the conclusion, the arguments, the length, all of that — is at a much higher level than the Springfield school system requires. Students come in who never wrote a paper. They were never asked to."

## High expectations

Springfield's Superintendent of Schools Peter J. Negroni doesn't flinch at Serota's critique. He calls The Learning Tree "an

excellent alternative to the failure of the system." The Learning Tree's small class sizes, holistic approach to students' social and emotional needs, and high expectations for academic performance are all qualities he's working to replicate in the city schools, Negroni said.

Lance Green, in describing the Learning Tree's academic demands, says, laughing, "It gets ugly. I don't want to use the word, 'force,' but it's the only word I can think of Art doesn't allow us to say, 'I don't know.' I don't know is not an answer. He makes us think. He wants us to be analytical, to think about what's going on."

"I'm a lot more knowledgeable now than I was before I came here," said Green, "not just academically, I mean socially, economically, politically. I didn't know anything. I didn't know what was going on in South Africa, or in Haiti, or in Northern Ireland, with the bombings and everything, until I came to Springfield (from Cambridge) and hooked up with the Learning Tree. Before, none of that stuff was important to me. Now it's all important to me."

Green currently works in a house for developmentally disabled citizens in East Longmeadow and as a mentor to middle school students in The Learning Tree's after-school program and at the nearby DeBerry Elementary School. He will be one of three students from The Learning Tree attending Springfield College in the fall majoring in education with plans to become teachers in the Springfield city schools.

The college is providing a generous scholarship. Serota is discussing with Springfield school administrators the students' future placement in the school system where he thinks the role models of black men are desperately needed.

Serota's example is what inspired Green to seek a teaching degree. Then he said, "I don't really want to be a teacher. I want to be an educator. You can teach someone to tie their shoes, but you educate them for life."

## Courageous program

Gregory Prince, president of Hampshire College, calls The Learning Tree "an incredibly courageous and imaginative pro-





# Boston West

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## Keeping Young Adults Out of Court

Arthur Serota handled 5,000 cases in his 17 years as a trial lawyer. In 1987 he walked away from his practice and turned to where he thought he could do the most

good: education. But not education in the standard sense. Serota is involved in alternative education that helps black and Latino youths rise above racism and poverty by earning their GED and going on to college. The school he founded, called The Learning Tree, is where Springfield lawyers such as Ned Barry of Robinson, Donovan and Beth Clarke of Doherty, Wallace do some of their pro bono work. The program has received dozens of accolades, and was recently the subject of a lengthy feature in The Boston Globe. Yet while Serota is committed to civil rights and education, he makes no bones about his admiration for attorneys who donate their time in other areas.

"I know so many lawyers in the Springfield area who either serve on boards of nonprofit organizations or provide them with extensive legal services. In terms of drawing up corporate papers, tax-exempt applications, setting up the corporate tax filing systems, etc.," he says, "many nonprofits would have a difficult time organizing and sustaining themselves without the pro bono legal services of lawyers with



David Lynch

## Pro Bono

Arthur Serota (left foreground), the "conscience" of the area's legal industry.





# Springfield Union-News

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1993

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## Unique program challenges students

By JESSICA CLARKE

AMHERST — Davaughn Miller and Lorenzo Gaines belong to what may be Hampshire College's newest alumni association.

Miller, 19, and Gaines, 23, both of Springfield, are part of the first class of the James Baldwin Scholars Pre-College Program, an initiative that started last fall on campus and aims to encourage students to attend college by challenging them with a year of preparatory work.

The two first-year students were among nine in the first class of Baldwin scholars last year and are among five of those now enrolled in the degree program at Hampshire. Eight of the nine students completed the program last year, and most of them are in college this semester.

Students selected for the program are those "who we feel need a year of preparatory work ... students who have already shown initiative and demonstrated a significant commitment to their own education," said Aaron Berman, a Hampshire history professor who directs the Baldwin program.

The program is named for James Baldwin, the late author who, for a while, was a Five-College professor based at Hampshire. It is geared toward minority students in Springfield and Holyoke. This year, four of the Baldwin scholars are from Springfield, one is from New Haven, Conn., and one is from Abilene, Tex.

Some of the students are high school graduates and some have GED diplomas.

Applicant referrals come mostly from high school counselors and teachers, community agencies and The Learning Tree, a Springfield educational program for black men.

Baldwin students attend Hampshire on full scholarships and are expected to have a campus job.

The Baldwin scholars, who live on campus with regular Hampshire students and take courses with them, must meet specific requirements to complete the pro-



Nancy Palmieri photo

**BALDWIN ALUMNI** — Hampshire College students Davaughn Miller, left, and Lorenzo Gaines, both of Springfield, participated last year in the Amherst college's first class of the James Baldwin Scholars Pre-College Program, which encourages disadvantaged youth to attend college.

gram. At the end of the year, a campus committee assesses the progress of each student to determine whether to offer admission to Hampshire, Berman said.

With last year's Baldwin scholars, "the progress really was remarkable, there's no other word for it," he said.

Mary Frye, academic director of the Baldwin program, said its focus is on education, not social work.

The program is unique in that students are integrated fully into Hampshire's regular academic curriculum, and "there is no re-

laxing of standards" for Baldwin scholars, Frye said.

Gaines and Miller can attest to that.

"The whole thing, it was mind-shattering," Gaines said.

"It was challenging," he said of the academic load last year. "It was an opportunity to prove to yourself, not to anyone else, that you could do it."

The program "increases your skills and gives you some gauge to determine where you are academically and socially," said Gaines, a 1988 graduate of the High School of Commerce.

Being a Baldwin scholar helped both students learn to manage their time effectively and become focused.

The program is not for everyone, though, Gaines said.

"You have to be a highly motivated individual," he said. "You can't be a follower or you'll get lost."

### Sought direction

Miller wasn't lost after high school, but he was seeking direction.

He had planned to attend Western New England College, but his father encouraged him to try the Hampshire program.

A 1992 graduate of the High School of Commerce, Miller was president of his class there and had planned to study aerospace engineering. Now he is interested in computer science, possibly in combination with music.

In addition to the academics last year, Miller and Gaines said the experience was culturally enriching for them.

"For me, it was culture shock, coming from an inner city" to a campus with mostly white students and faculty, said Miller, who is black. "It's helped me cope" with a diverse world.

"Not having black faculty members or a large number of black students ... it was really hard," said Gaines, who is black and had planned to attend Morehouse College in Atlanta before learning of the Baldwin program.

After high school, Gaines worked at an environmental company in Colorado and at a law firm in Springfield and took courses at Springfield College.





# WGBY honors 4 civil rights activists

By CHRIS HAMEL

**SPRINGFIELD** — Four champions of civil rights were honored yesterday with the fourth annual Eyes on the Prize Awards sponsored by public television station WGBY.

The honorees were the late Alexander B. Mapp, former executive director of the Urban League of Springfield; the Rev. Dr. Ronald Peters, a professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and a former community leader here; Elaine B. Rucks of Springfield, a field representative for the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination; and Arthur Serota of Springfield, founder and director of the Learning Tree, an alternative school.

Praise was heaped on the four at an afternoon reception at the Marriott Hotel. Among the speakers were Mayor Robert T. Markel, Steven M. Bass, general manager of WGBY, School Committee member Allene B. Curto, Georgia Thomas Parks, MCAD commissioner, and Charlayne Hunter-Gault, award-winning correspondent for the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour on PBS.

Formal ceremonies, including a keynote speech by Hunter-Gault, were slated last night at WGBY. A taped broadcast of the formal event will air Saturday at 8 p.m. on WGBY, Channel 57.

The awards are named for a PBS series which chronicled the civil rights movement in the U.S. After the reception, Hunter-

Gault said her keynote remarks would focus on the values of that movement.

"This group in this room is an affirmation (of those values)," she said. "The challenge is to try and regain a consensus as we go forward."

Prior to the reception, Edna R. Mapp of Springfield said she was thrilled by the honor bestowed on her late husband, who was a cultural officer with the U.S. Information Service and the first chief executive of the Office of Contract Compliance of the Defense Administration.

She said her granddaughter, Malsha N. Aleem, a student at Elms College in Chicopee, would make an acceptance speech at the formal event.

Peters, a former School Committee member and founder of the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, said the award symbolized to him the "spiritual bonding" of those he and his family had worked with on community projects here.

Rucks, a former board member and officer in the League of Women Voters and the NAACP, said she was elated at receiving the award, but viewed herself only as a representative of those who had the same commitment and made the same sacrifices.

Serota, a lawyer and community activist, said he was honored by the award because he felt it recognized such work as the fight against racism, efforts on behalf of the poor and challenging the established order.

## Union-News

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## 'Prize' awards honor activists

Anyone who missed meeting Charlayne Hunter-Gault when she visited Springfield Wednesday missed a treat.

Her poise and aplomb, which have helped to make her the award-winning national correspondent that she is for the Public Broadcasting System's MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour, shine even brighter in person than they do on television.

It was quite fitting for Hunter-Gault, who made civil rights history in 1961 when she became one of the first black students ever enrolled at the University of Georgia, to come here and pay tribute to four local civil rights champions.

She was the special guest at this year's Eyes on the Prize Awards ceremony, sponsored by WGBY/Channel 57 to recognize individuals who've made great contributions to the civil rights cause in the Springfield area.

This year's recipients are Elaine B. Rucks, The Rev. Ronald Peters, Arthur Serota, and the late Alexander B. Mapp. Eyes on the Prize Awards were introduced in 1990 and named for Henry Hampton's much lauded series that chronicled the civil rights movement.

Those who missed meeting the gifted Hunter-Gault, and learning the remarkable stories of each of the award recipients on Wednesday, can watch the awards ceremony tomorrow night at 8 when it airs on Channel 57.





# UNTwisted

The private line to the real world

## Learning Tree fills gaps in educational system

By JAMES WIGGINS

The Learning Tree is an alternative education program which seeks to fill in gaps created by traditional educational systems. It is a place where you can learn and get help. Once you are a member, you can prepare for college, attend classes, receive tutoring, learn how to operate computers and improve your skills in reading, writing, science, math, social studies and other subjects. Meals and other services are also provided.



James Wiggins is a 1993 graduate of Putnam High School in Springfield.

The Learning Tree has two categories of students: those who are preparing for college and those who are still in school and seeking to improve their grades.

The college prep program is designed for students who are 17 years of age or older and have completed high school, or have dropped out and are now in the process of obtaining a GED. Prep classes meet from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. The After School Program is designed for students 16 and younger. It is run from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Inner-city kids in the community who go to The Learning Tree can also play games, like Connect Four, checkers and chess. There are also field trips to different colleges, like Hampshire College.

"We understand that the school system is not a success

## What's Cool in School

place for many of our students, and yet they are all brilliant. We are able to develop their brilliance into success," explained Art Serota, director of The Learning Tree. "College prep students come to The Learning Tree to get prepared for college and to get help in financial aid assistance."

Many volunteers come to help with the after school programs. Students from Hampshire College's James Baldwin Scholarship Program and other students from Westfield State College, Hudson Valley Community College, Springfield Technical Community College, Springfield College and Morgan State University all come back to the community to contribute to The Learning Tree by helping students with their homework, talking and listening to them.

"You don't have to get all dressed up to meet the standards of high school students," explained student Jose Morales. "You can just be yourself."

\* \* \*

James Wiggins has been accepted to attend Johnson and Wales College in Providence, R.I., this September. He continues to prepare for his college career at The Learning Tree.





# Springfield would win as 'Unsung Heroes'

By CHRIS HAMMILL

SPRINGFIELD — Rhonda R. Byrd, Malwin J. Davila and Christian D. Smith got a moment in the spotlight.

The three Springfield teen-agers were among youths honored last night as "Unsung Heroes" by the Black Men of Greater Springfield, at the organization's third annual dinner dance at the Sheraton at Monarch Place.

Arthur D. Serota, executive director of The Learning Tree, a private, non-profit college preparatory academy in Springfield, also was recognized by the association with an award for community service. The Black Men of Greater Springfield was founded in 1991 to respond to a perceived lack of black role models. The non-profit group has more than 75 members.

James E. Goodman of Springfield, who is chairman of fund raising, noted that the Unsung Heroes were local students, who had not been fully recognized for their achievements. He noted that the awards were designed to motivate them to continue toward their goals.

Smith, 17, a senior at the High School of Commerce, said he plans to study psychology next fall at Hampton University in Virginia.

"I like the whole concept of an 'Unsung Heroes' award because a lot of times in school, in the classroom, you don't really get recognized, even if you have good ideas," he said. "I feel real motivated (now), inspired to do more."

Davila, 18, a senior at Putnam Vocational & Technical High School, has received trophies as an outstanding member of Putnam's wrestling team. His guidance counselor told him several days ago that he would receive an 'Unsung Heroes' citation.

"I was honestly surprised to be

Continued on Page A-14



Staff photo by Bo

**COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD** — Arthur D. Serota, left, executive director of The Learning Tree, who was honored by the Black Men of Greater Springfield for his community service, chats with Lance J. Green, president of the organization, at last night's dinner dance at the Sheraton in Springfield.

Continued from Page A-9

told I was getting this," said Davila, who will attend the University of Massachusetts in Amherst next fall. "I consider this different than being honored in sports. It's more an overall award."

Byrd, 18, a senior at Commerce, plans to study biology in the fall at Western New England College, with a goal of becoming a pediatrician.

"I love working with children and I always wanted to be a doctor," she said.

Chosen this year as the most valuable player on the Commerce girls' basketball team, Byrd also was honored last fall as "Girl Hero" by the Carew Hill Girls Club.

But of last night's recognition, she said, "It feels great."

Serota, 49, said, "It's an honor to be recognized by

friends you respect most, and especially to be honored for the work with youth."

One of his students, Lance J. Green of Springfield who will attend Springfield College next fall, said was happy about Serota's selection.

"No one deserves it more than he does," he said. "He gives a lot and asks very little in return — just that we learn and try to make change."

LaPheris "Al" Powers of Springfield, the organization's vice president, noted that from June through August the group will sponsor "Summerfest '94: The Joy of Summer." He said that the program will be a multi-cultural series of events, aimed at youth featuring cultural and educational opportunities.

He noted that last night's event was not designed to raise money.

"It's to let the public know the things we're doing and the importance of the future," he said.

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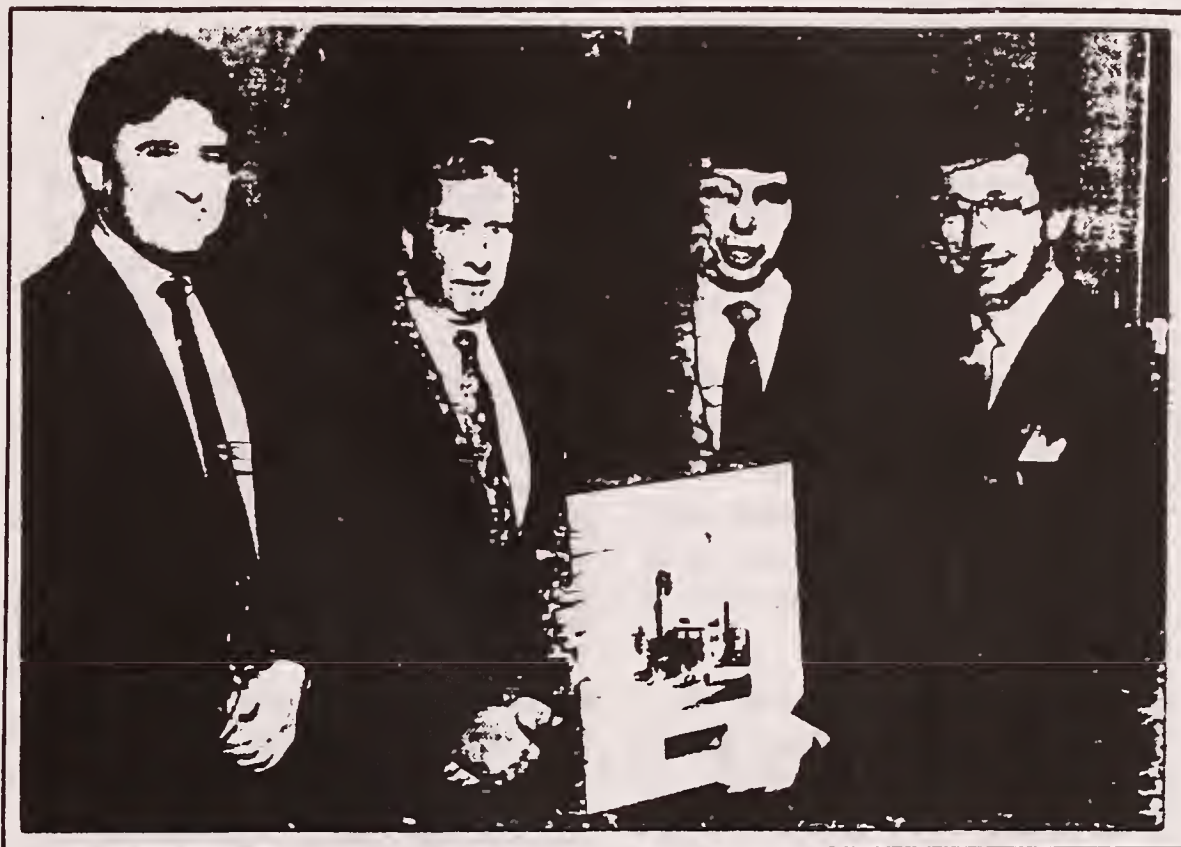
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# Massachusetts Bar Association



Arthur D. Serota (third from left) is presented the Massachusetts Bar Association Community Service Award by (from left) Hampden County Bar Association immediate past President Michael O. Jennings, Hampden County Bar Association president William M. Fitzgerald, and MBA President Leo V. Boyle.

## *Springfield Lawyer Receives Community Service Award*

Arthur D. Serota of Springfield has been presented with the Massachusetts Bar Association's 1990-1991 Community Service Award for Hampden County by MBA President Leo V. Boyle.

Serota received the award in recognition of his commitment to community-oriented efforts. The award was presented at the recent Hampden County Bar Association annual meeting at the directors room in the Bay Bank Valley building in Springfield.

In nominating Serota for the award, the Hampden County Bar Association made particular note of his efforts on behalf of the Learning Tree, a community-based education program which prepares Springfield's inner-city youth for graduate equivalency degrees and college admissions. Serota is the Learning Tree's executive director.

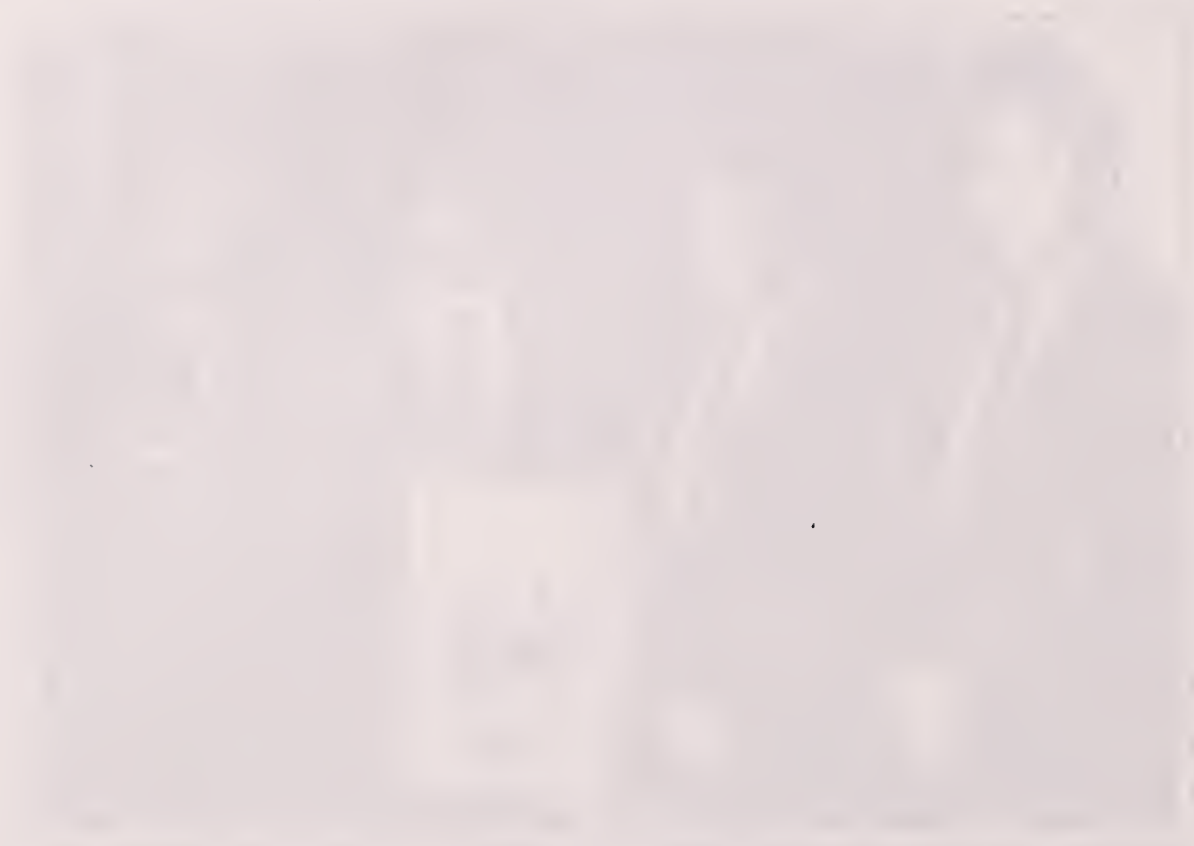
Serota has served the community as a

guest lecturer at community organizations, legal seminars and civic groups and colleges. He has been active in the Western Massachusetts Coalition Against Apartheid and in the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center in Springfield. Serota won the Martin Luther King Social Justice Award from the town of Amherst in 1989. Serota spent several years aiding communities in Zimbabwe, Africa, through teaching and participating in a variety of rural development, agricultural and educational projects.

The Award is presented annually to a lawyer who has performed an act, or acts, of outstanding public service. Nominees are approved for the award by a three-person panel consisting of the MBA president, the president of the county bar and the publisher of Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly.



# Massachusetts Bar Association



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## Continuing Legal Education Programs

The Massachusetts Bar Association provides a variety of continuing legal education programs for its members. These programs are designed to help members stay current in their field and improve their skills. The programs include seminars, workshops, and webinars. Members can earn credit for these programs towards their required continuing education hours.

For more information about the Massachusetts Bar Association's continuing legal education programs, please visit our website at [www.msbar.org](http://www.msbar.org). You will find a complete list of programs and information about how to register for them.

## *Insurance company gives \$25,000 to 2 programs*

SPRINGFIELD — Representatives of Aetna Life and Casualty Co. were honored yesterday afternoon for their presentation of two \$25,000 checks to two Springfield school-to-work programs at a reception hosted by Bay State Skills Corp. at the Bank of Boston Building.

Aetna Vice President William Koppang said, "We are very pleased to work in this partnership with CS2 (Communities and Schools for Career Success) and The Learning Tree. Aetna is committed to enhancing educational opportunities through our foundation. We want to make a difference in our communities."

Erik Payne Butler of Bay State Skills Corp., the quasi-public agency that developed CS2 and is managing its implementation, said, "It is extremely significant for a national organization of Aetna's calibre to demonstrate its deep roots

in Springfield by committing to the local development of programs like CS2 and The Learning Tree. Aetna's contribution matches its community leadership with its well-known business leadership."

Art Serota, executive director of The Learning Tree, said, "We are grateful to Aetna Life & Casualty for joining us in helping the youth of Springfield reach their full potential. Aetna's generous contribution will help us expand the programs that we have designed to help young men finish their education and turn their lives around. We are certain that the positive ripple effect of this event will be felt for a long time to come by the youth of our city."





Working on it

"This school, like other schools, has too many students dropping out. It's a problem that we continue to work on," he said.

At Commerce, 237 are expected to graduate. That is 48 percent of the 495 who were counted as 10th-graders three years ago.

Principal Willette Johnson said she is wary of analyzing the numbers because they don't reflect a dropout rate. Some students have moved, and others are now in different grades or at other schools in the city.

"I'm not sure those youngsters are all dropouts. But for those who are, I am concerned," she said.

Students often drop out at Commerce because they have slipped backwards in grades and feel too old, or in the case of girls, they have become parents and "run into their own set of problems," Johnson said.

Bridge Academy, an alternative school, stands out this year as the only high school that will graduate more students than were in attendance as sophomores in October 1990.

### 38 graduates

On June 4, 38 are expected to graduate in a ceremony at Central High School. Three years ago, there were 32 sophomores at the school.

Bridge Principal Mary Mushok called the numbers "meaningless" because the school has such a transient population.

Of the graduating class, only three students have been at Bridge longer than two years. And 12, or almost a third of the class, are parents.

In other communities in the area, students tend to complete school where they started.

At West Springfield High School, 233 are expected to graduate, or 90 percent of the 260 counted as sophomores.

Assistant Principal David Douglas said the school system has a documented dropout rate of about 3½ percent. Officials work hard to keep students in school, he said.

### Same, but fewer

"We have the same kinds of problems facing the cities, but fewer of them. The population is changing," said Douglas, who worked in the Springfield schools for 20 years before leaving four years ago for West Springfield.

## The Class of '93

### How many will graduate?

The chart looks at the class of 1993, comparing the number of 10th-graders in 1990 with the number expected to graduate next month. Statewide, the graduation rate was 82% in 1991, the most recent year for which figures are available.

SCHOOL	ENTERED GRADE 10 1990	EXPECTED TO GRADUATE 1993	PERCENT GRADUATING
Central H.S.	884	537	64%
H.S. of Commerce	495	237	48%
Putnam H.S.	484	197	41%
East Longmeadow H.S.	152	146	96%
Longmeadow H.S.	218	206	94%
West Springfield H.S.	260	233	90%
Chicopee H.S.	230	199	87%
Holyoke H.S.	322	215	67%
Dean Technical H.S.	179	117	65%

Union-News chart

## City dropout rate concerns educators

Continued from Page 1

counted as sophomores nearly three years ago.

Principal Celeste Budd-Jackson said the school has a better graduating rate than others in the city because of academic programs geared toward higher education.

At Putnam, there were 484 sophomores in the fall of 1990, and 197 of those are expected to graduate.

Principal Clifford Flint said the numbers reflect more than dropouts; they include students who have left Putnam because they don't like the programs or because they are moving out of the city.

But he acknowledged the school has a dropout problem that officials are working to turn around.

At Chicopee High School, 199 are expected to graduate. That is 87 percent of the 230 who were in the 10th grade three years ago.

At Longmeadow High School, 206 will graduate, or 94 percent of the 218 who were counted as sophomores three years ago.

East Longmeadow High School is expected to graduate 146 seniors, or 96 percent of the sophomores counted three years ago.

At Holyoke High School, 215 are expected to graduate, or 67 percent of the 322 who entered 10th grade in 1990. At Dean Vocational High School in Holyoke, 117 are expected to graduate, or 65 percent of the 170 sophomores counted three years ago.







